



closer to ourselves

Stories from the Journey towards Peace in South Asia

Compiled by
Anupama Sekhar



WISCOMP

Foundation for
Universal
Responsibility

Women in Security, Conflict Management & Peace

An initiative of

The Foundation for Universal Responsibility
of His Holiness the Dalai Lama
New Delhi, India



closer to ourselves

Stories from the Journey towards Peace in South Asia

A collaborative project by
the South Asian alumni of the
Annual Conflict Transformation Workshops

Compiled by
Anupama Sekhar



Women in Security, Conflict Management & Peace

An initiative of
The Foundation for Universal Responsibility
of His Holiness the Dalai Lama
New Delhi, India

Copyright © WISCOMP, Foundation for Universal Responsibility
New Delhi, India, 2008

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published by
WISCOMP
Foundation for Universal Responsibility
of His Holiness the Dalai Lama
Core 4 A, Upper Ground Floor, India Habitat Centre
Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110003
India

**This initiative was made possible by a grant from the Embassy of Finland
and with support from the Ford Foundation, New Delhi, India.**

Printed by
Communication Consultants, New Delhi, India

CONTENTS



Preface	05
About WISCOMP	06
Acknowledgements	07

THE STORIES

OF GENERATIONS

Stories of Four Generations of South Asians

First Generation

Stuti Bhatnagar <i>Sharing memories</i>	11
---	----

Second Generation

Smriti Vij <i>Homeward bound</i>	13
Ishtiaq Ali Mekhri <i>Love & longing in Chennai</i>	16

Third Generation

Of Otherness & Belonging

Radhika Govinda <i>The politics of being and becoming</i>	18
B. Rajeshwari <i>In everyday life</i>	20
Meenakshi Chhabra <i>Gatherers of new fruits</i>	22
Maria Saifuddin Effendi <i>No longer anonymous</i>	24
Khadija Amjad <i>Singing the same songs</i>	26

CT Workshop Experiences

Muna Baig & Jyotirmoy Chaudhuri <i>It has to be us</i>	27
Deepti Mahajan <i>Generating change</i>	29
Nausheen Wasi <i>A meeting of 'enemies'</i>	31
Muna Baig & Soumita Basu <i>Ongoing conversations</i>	33
Imran Bashir Awan & Ahmed Ijaz Malik <i>Bringing people closer</i>	35
Nadia Anjum <i>Lessons in building bridges</i>	37
Anisha Kinra & Seema Sridhar <i>First steps & giant leaps</i>	38
Javed Ahmad Tak <i>Finding common ground</i>	41

Generation Next

Kamran Rehmat <i>Suhani's song of peace</i>	42
Arshia Ahmed Ayub & Najma Sanai <i>An idea whose time has come</i>	45

OF GEOGRAPHIES

Stories of Home & Beyond from South Asia

Bangladesh

Zakia Haque <i>The birth of hope</i>	49
--	----

India

First Impressions

Ambreen Sehr Noon <i>Finding emancipation in the heart of the enemy</i>	51
Salma Malik <i>22 hours to New Delhi</i>	53
Evelyn Thornton <i>From Delhi to Darfur: A journey in mindfulness</i>	55
Saira Yamin <i>My love affair with India</i>	57
Rubia Jabbar <i>Warm winds from the East</i>	59
Saira Bano Orakzai <i>A great grand-daughter's journey</i>	61
Kashif Saeed <i>Between two estranged neighbours</i>	63

Into the Heart of India

Zahid Shahab Ahmed <i>On the Tamil Nadu Express</i>	65
Biraj Swain <i>The necessary tyranny of memory</i>	67
Bhabananda Takhellambam <i>Conflict & history: In defence</i>	69

Kashmir

Syed Sarwar Kashani <i>Dateline Srinagar</i>	72
Seema Shekhawat <i>They who wait</i>	75
Ather Zia <i>Redemption</i>	77

Nepal

Babita Basnet <i>Women & the people's war</i>	81
---	----

Pakistan

Shreya Jani <i>Those borders in my mind</i>	84
Siddhartha Dave <i>Jisne Lahore nahi dekha</i>	87
Maria Gulraize Khan <i>Have you received our visa application, sir?</i>	89
Meenakshi Gopinath <i>Etchings on a wave</i>	91
Manjrika Sewak <i>Synchronicity</i>	95
Anupama Sekhar <i>Two states of home</i>	96

CT WORKSHOP DIARIES

THIS HOME	99
REDEFINING PEACE	102
WILL OUR GENERATION DELIVER PEACE?	104
WHY I CHOSE THE WORK I DO	107
INDIA DIARIES	109
PAKISTAN DIARIES	111

Alumni of the WISCOMP CT Workshops 2001-2007	112
---	-----

WISCOMP CT Publications	123
--------------------------------------	-----

PREFACE

We are the stories we tell. In a region long haunted by bitter tales of partition, *Closer to Ourselves* is an attempt to create a new point of reference for ourselves to tell positive stories about each other.

For over seven years now, 150 youth leaders from across South Asia have been meeting, learning and training together at the Annual Conflict Transformation (CT) Workshops organised by WISCOMP in New Delhi. These young professionals, mainly from Pakistan and India, represent academia, media, civil society, international organisations and the social sector.

Since 2001, the Workshop alumni have been engaged in dialogues of life and intellectual exchange, discussing everything from movies and careers to CBMs and peace accords. From these continuing voyages – within and without – have doubtlessly emerged powerful experiences that have inspired, informed or persuaded us. At WISCOMP's Fifth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Collaborative Explorations* in late 2006, the time felt right to embark on a dialogue of common action to record our personal transformation on the challenging and inspiring journey towards peace in South Asia.

The result is this collection, *Closer to Ourselves: Stories from the Journey towards Peace in South Asia*, which developed steadily over the course of 2007. Here, young South Asians don the mantle of storytellers to narrate personal experiences of conflict transformation from their individual and collective journeys towards peace. As Workshop alumni Anisha Kinra and Seema Sridhar rightly suggest in their narrative, "Personal stories become the simplest, most direct and remarkable means of communication between one human being and another." This is why the alumni of WISCOMP's CT Workshops have chosen to share personal reflections of their forecasts and feelings on South Asia, peace, friendship and transformation.

All the stories collected here come from the alumni's engagement with building bridges. Some take the form of incidents that capture the splendid resilience of peace and simultaneously, its intense fragility. Others recount experiences that vigourously challenge long-held stereotypes of "the other" and significantly reshape our understanding of peace. The mood in these stories evolves from scepticism to transformation and eloquently captures the challenges and victories of peacebuilding. In keeping with the spirit of

WISCOMP's Fifth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Collaborative Explorations*, some alumni have co-authored stories.

The beauty of this collaborative storytelling project was the initial inability to predict the direction it would eventually take. The spirit and structure of the collection evolved as we received stories from the alumni. Eventually, the personal narratives came to be categorised under two sections: *Of Generations*, which showcases stories of four generations of South Asians and *Of Geographies*, which showcases stories of home and beyond in South Asia. As the book took final shape, grief and healing, wonder and forgiveness, hope and transformation mingled to create a narrative that has

doubtlessly brought us "closer to ourselves".

Closer to Ourselves tells us where we have been and how many miles we have yet to tread in the quest for peace. Such sharing will surely enable us to understand each other better and further strengthen our sense of community as we journey together. These acts of personal storytelling, I hope, will also liberate us into newer ways of perceiving and experiencing peace in South Asia.

Anupama Sekhar

Fellow

Centre for Communication & Development Studies, Pune &

WISCOMP CT Workshop alumna, 2003 & 2004



Dialogues of life and intellectual exchange at the Conflict Transformation Workshops

ABOUT WISCOMP

WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) is an initiative of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, based in New Delhi, India.

WISCOMP is a South Asian research and training initiative, which facilitates the leadership of women in the areas of peace, security and international affairs. Initiated in 1999 by Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath who currently serves as the Honorary Director, WISCOMP positions its work at the confluence of peacebuilding, conflict transformation and security studies. The intersection of these with gender concerns provides the focus of its engagement and is the leitmotif that informs its programmes.

The programmes at WISCOMP reflect its mission to facilitate gender sensitive peacebuilding, research, dialogue and conflict transformation in South Asia.

Conflict Transformation

In keeping with the spirit of universal responsibility and its role in facilitating active coexistence, the Conflict Transformation Programme builds a crucial interface between issues relating to conflict, security, nonviolence and peacebuilding.

As part of this Programme, practitioners and scholars engage extensively to build a synergy between the theory and praxis of conflict transformation in South Asia.

The Conflict Transformation Programme seeks to:

- Empower a new generation of women and men, in South Asia, with the motivation, skills, and expertise to engage in processes of nonviolent change in different conflict settings. These include conflicts ranging from the intra-personal and inter-personal to those at the community, intra-national and international level.
- Introduce Conflict Transformation as a field of study in South Asia.
- Foreground the lens of gender in the analysis of conflict and in the conceptualisation of peace initiatives.
- Provide a reflexive curriculum for peace that evolves in response to changing regional and international landscapes. This is done through knowledge sharing, theory-building, skill enhancement and critical reflection on contemporary thinking and practices in conflict analysis, mediation, multi-track diplomacy, reconciliation, justice and post-conflict peacebuilding.
- Build partnerships, mentoring relationships and a network of peace practitioners and theoreticians who can contribute to peacebuilding initiatives in South Asia and the world.

Workshops, conferences and fora held under the Conflict Transformation Programme include:

- First Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Rehumanising the Other*, 2001
- Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Transcending Conflict*, 2003
- Third Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Dialogic Engagement*, 2004
- Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Envisioning Futures*, 2005
- Fifth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Collaborative Explorations*, 2006
- Sixth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Coexistence & Trust Building: Transforming Relationships*, 2007
- Symposium: Conflict Resolution: *Trends and Prospects*, 2001
- Public Forum: *Track Two, Citizen's Diplomacy – Innovative Possibilities for Peace*, 2003

The Conflict Transformation Workshops are open to South Asian women and men, interested in the field/s of conflict prevention and early warning, conflict management, conflict resolution, conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

Acknowledgements

In the year 2000, WISCOMP initiated the Conflict Transformation Programme to facilitate cross-border dialogue and partnerships between young South Asian professionals, with a special emphasis on the peace process between Pakistan and India. Highlighting experiences of personal and social transformation, this publication is the outcome of a collaborative project undertaken by the South Asian alumni of the WISCOMP-led dialogues on peacebuilding.

WISCOMP is grateful to Ambassador Asko Numminen and Second Secretary Ms. Anna-Kaisa Heikkinen, Embassy of Finland, New Delhi, for their visionary support and guidance.

Compiled by Ms. Anupama Sekhar, an alumna of the Conflict Transformation Workshops, *Closer to Ourselves: Stories from the Journey towards Peace in South Asia* seeks to illustrate the power of human contact and its ability to empower individuals across the divisions of conflict to build strategic relationships for peacebuilding.

We would like to thank Mr. Rajiv Mehrotra and the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for their sustained support and encouragement.

This publication would not have been possible without the leadership and guidance of Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, WISCOMP's Founder and Honorary Director. Special thanks to the alumni of the Conflict Transformation Workshops who took time out to share the inspirational stories compiled here.

The WISCOMP Team



of generations

STORIES OF FOUR GENERATIONS OF SOUTH ASIANS

Collected here are stories of our parents and grandparents. Of ourselves and our children.

The personal narratives in this section reflect what WISCOMP's Founder & Honorary Director, Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath aptly calls our "many many conversations with oneself". Also captured in these stories are our dialogues with each other across the generations. Dialogues that – in keeping with the themes of WISCOMP's Conflict Transformation Workshops – attempt to re-humanise the other, transcend conflict, engage constructively and envision futures.

SHARING MEMORIES

STUTI BHATNAGAR



“You just can’t trust these Muslims.”
 “I hope the Pakistani cricket team loses.”
 “We will never give away Kashmir to the Pakistanis.”
 “Because Pakistan was created, we had to leave our lands, come here and start from scratch.”

Recollecting these statements from the past often make me wonder just how much has truly changed.

How does the past impact the future? Does it impact the future at all? Is it possible to discard the memories of the past into the bygone era of yesterdays? I have often wondered about these questions.

Recurring questions. Still without simple answers.

Who am I?

Unearthing my family identity

My metropolitan upbringing has often overshadowed my ethnic and religious identities. I stumbled upon these identities purely by chance. It was triggered by the simple fact of a cricket match between arch sporting foes, India and Pakistan. During one such match, my grandmother’s anguish and pain, well acquainted with the memories of the partition days, came to the fore. It happened in response to being questioned by my younger sister on the common Indian need to be passionate about Pakistan’s loss in a cricket match.

It was at that moment in time that we – third generation Indians - came face-to-face with an ocean of memories. Memories, both good and bad, from my grandparents’ generation. Memories of childhood life and of losing a home. Of uncertainties and betrayals and memories. Of a longing to be back in that bygone space at some point in time. For years, these memories had been suppressed and hidden from us; so, we had very few clues to the history and identity of the family. What could otherwise have been a useful lesson instead led to a total disregard for the struggles and achievements of elders who started life afresh in India in 1947. I realised – at this point and for the first time – that I belonged to a Punjabi family with roots in pre-partition Lahore and Rawalpindi, now in Pakistan.

Who are they?

Encountering the familiar ‘other’

That conversation stayed with me. I continued to reflect on it from time to time. It perked my curiosity as a 15-year old to know more about the partition and

what happened then. The numerous research studies conducted on the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 are in agreement on one historical fact: that the event was a holocaustal one affecting millions of human lives and altering the identities and realities of generations of South Asians. People had not only been uprooted from their land but also from the reality of their very identity. They had not merely lost their means of livelihood but also access to childhood memories. They had lost the opportunity to perform simple, everyday gestures like revisiting the place of their ancestors or their old playgrounds and schools.

One basic contention of that conversation was that the Muslims migrating to Pakistan had resorted to more violence than the Indians. This argument triggered an interest in finding out just what these ‘Pakistanis’ were all about.



Stuti Bhatnagar with CT Workshop alumni Zahid Shahab Ahmed (Islamabad) and Michelle Baxter (Chennai)

Despite the contemporary globalised environment, avenues of interaction for common Indians and Pakistanis remain severely limited. Consequently, I was extremely lucky to have just such an opportunity (and not once, but several times) thanks to WISCOMP’s Annual Conflict Transformation Workshops in New Delhi. Year after year, these workshops bring together young Indian and Pakistani professionals to deliberate on peace and conflict transformation. Crucially positioned as the Workshop’s Participant Coordinator, I enjoyed the chance to interact with the participants both during and much beyond the ten days of the residential event in Delhi.

I first met the Pakistanis at WISCOMP’s Third Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Dialogic Engagement*

SHARING MEMORIES

in 2004. What struck me the most about my interactions with them was the ease with which I could talk to these people, relate to their language and identify (quite substantially) with their culture despite our differing religious identities. This made me realise just how much my Punjabi identity – of which I had been unaware all these years – had a bearing on my communication.

The subsequent Conflict Transformation Workshops (*Envisioning Futures* in 2005 & *Collaborative Explorations* in 2006) provided more avenues of interaction with Pakistanis. These Workshops have blessed me with many cherished memories and some very close relationships that extend far beyond the artificial border created between the people of our two countries.

Who are we?

Bringing together two estranged generations

The conversations I have had with my friends from Pakistan are countless and it is a tough task indeed to pick a particular story or experience to share! Nevertheless, I would like to mention a couple of my experiences and conversations with Zahid Shahab Ahmed, a Conflict Transformation Workshop alumnus from Pakistan.

Zahid once narrated a partition story very different from my own. Of how he had – during the visit to his hometown by a Hindu family in the early 80s – come to know of the kind deeds of his grandfather during the partition of 1947.

“The headmaster of a school in Toba Tek Singh (now in Punjab, Pakistan), my grandfather had helped many Hindu families with medicines, food and transportation during the partition. It had all been done so that the Hindu families could have a safe journey towards their new homeland, India. We came to know about these dignified deeds of our grandfather only when members of one of these Hindu families visited our hometown in the early 80s. Through their expression of gratitude for our grandfather, they provided us with crucial insights into our family’s close association with the partition,” recalled Zahid.

According to me, unearthing such stories is critical because the partition generation is disappearing with time. However, it is equally important to attempt to heal these wounds in every possible manner and to achieve some measure of reconciliation with the past.

The need of the hour is dialogue: dialogue among the members of the partition generation as well as dialogue between the first and third generations of Indians and Pakistanis. It is important to learn from the lessons of the past, to take pride in achievements, to find common ground so that we can move towards a peaceful future.

Closer to Ourselves, this collection of real stories by young Indians and Pakistanis, will enable historians from both sides to engage with each other to evolve a common version of history, rather than the contradictory one currently in existence. Also, a common history textbook could be used in Indian and Pakistani educational institutions, so as to remove the prejudices internalised due to the teaching of distorted histories. Although some would consider it wishful thinking, in this, the sixtieth year of Indian and Pakistani independence, my experience says that such a move is indeed possible, although only in very incremental terms.

During one of his visits to India, I introduced Zahid, my Pakistani friend from the Workshop, to my grandparents. As they interacted with this young Pakistani, it was a humbling experience for me to witness the emerging dialogue. It moved from an atmosphere of total suspicion and hostility, through apprehension to some level of comfort with, and curiosity about, this person from the land of their birth. It grew into a sharing of the stories of familiar sites from their childhood memories and finally ended in the hope and longing that, perhaps, one day their grandchild – me – would be able to visit the land of their past through this rehumanised other – Zahid – and, thus, complete their journey, at least, in spirit.

The questions that are now put to me by my grandparents are these, “When are you going to Pakistan? Will you ask Zahid and your other “friends” to help you find our previous homes in Lahore and Rawalpindi?”

~

Stuti Bhatnagar has served as Junior Programme Officer at WISCOMP, New Delhi, India. She is currently working on her Doctoral Thesis titled *The Role of Islam in Iran's Policy Towards Pakistan* and is presently based in the UAE.



HOMeward BOUND

SMRITI VIJ



I grew up in Delhi. In government-owned houses. The houses, they kept changing but were always in Delhi. The world, to me, was “the house”.

Worlds within

In these many Delhi houses, my parents and their three daughters – of who I am the youngest – survived rather amicably. Until, of course, we girls grew up and yearned to step out to search for our place in the world.

It was around this time – in the late 1980s – that my father chose to retire from the Indian army to be with us in Delhi where my mother served as a government doctor. The years that followed were those of constant friction: between a couple struggling to raise their three daughters and among the three siblings who had but each other for company. We were, it seemed to me then, another regular middle-income Delhi family.

We siblings lived with the common identities of being an army officer’s children. Of our mother being a doctor. We knew that my parents had their “roots” in Kashmir. And that most of our relatives lived in Jammu: relatives who often visited us, but whom we – my parents and us, siblings – visited but on some special occasion. My parents would make the journey willingly, but the children, most often out of compulsion.

Yet, photo albums kept us acquainted with my father’s army service, my mother’s memories of the Srinagar of snow, strawberries and family relationships from her growing up years in the 50s and 60s and our sole 1987 trip to the Kashmir valley as a family of five.

Worlds without

Around the time I turned 15 (and maybe because radio and television sneaked in comfortably), the world within the house began to grow uncomfortable. Suddenly, I wanted more than rich Kashmiri food and nostalgic photographs. I had grown more ambitious about the world that lay beyond. Something felt quite amiss and it became clear to me that I had to look for a voice of my own to communicate with the world outside “the house”. Little did I know then that this seeking would become my life’s calling, enabling me to wade through the chaos that lay deep within.

By the time I reached college, I had become more conscious of this ambition. Yet I wondered whether it

contained some higher purpose or if it was merely ambition for its own sake. The dilemma grew stronger in the years that followed, when I joined the journalism programme at Delhi’s Lady Shri Ram College and finally stepped out of my childhood routine comprising of the army school and the house.

College gave me different eyes with which to view the world. For the first time, I began communicating with my parents about their life’s journey and how it may have affected our growing up years. I now tried to understand the reasons behind my father’s insistence on security and his extreme anxiety to educate his daughters. I observed that each of us – the three siblings – felt a strong need to develop our artistic talents in some form.

I realised also that – being the youngest member of my generation in my father’s entire family, displaced from Muzzafarabad in 1947 – I had received many more opportunities to follow my ambition.

Worlds past

Until this time, all I knew about 1947 was that which was taught in text books, namely the partition of British India into the independent nations of India and Pakistan.

The contentious history of the 1947 attack that led to the first war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir is, I believe, a history that is not often cited while discussing the puzzle called Kashmir. All through that October of 1947 – at a time when India had become independent



Smriti Vij (second from right) at the First Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, *Rehumanising the Other*, 2001

HOMEWARD BOUND

but when Kashmir was not yet a part of India or Pakistan – Muzaffarabad was amongst the Kashmiri areas that lay plundered. My father's ten-year-old eyes matured from the unwelcome sights of the horror that was.

In the wars that were to follow in 1965 and 1971, my father served as a communications engineer. And, perhaps the most troublesome memory that clouded my father's mind every time he felt alone was that of seeing his own father being shot dead during the 1947 raid. Young eyes in Kashmir continue to grow up with a disproportionate share of horror. The trauma of conflict and displacement persists.

Worlds ahead

As college life drew to a close, a series of rare opportunities emerged and broke the ice between my parents and me. A barrage of questions that had never before even crossed my mind now left it brimming with restlessness. I had been chosen to visit Lahore as part of a student delegation from Lady Shri Ram College. It was the first time that I was going to live away from home, even if just for a week! My parents were glad at what they felt was a rare opportunity. Besides the naive excitement of travelling abroad and to a normally unreachable country, I did not quite anticipate what was in store for me. Or how it would impact me. The week that followed greatly surprised me. What I had imagined to be an unreachable foreign land felt instead like home!

In the months that followed my first journey, a group of Pakistani university students travelled to India and we sat down together at WISCOMP's inaugural Conflict Transformation Workshop *Rehumanising the Other* in 2001. Looking back, I now realise the deep personal impact of that experience at a time when I was trying to assimilate the perceptions of peace and conflict I had grown up with. Notions conditioned by news reports, my parents' experiences and our army background.

Following the Workshop, I spent a year abroad for higher education. There – away from the comfort zone of home – several thought processes began. The angst set in. I knew it would lead me someplace more knowledgeable about the conflict within. In my opinion, internal conflict is the consequence of both a larger conflict (in our case, this being the burden of displacement) as well as the cause for another conflict – in my case, that between me and my parents.

Journeys within

When I returned to India in 2003, I was invited to the second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Transcending Conflict* which brought together peace practitioners and media professionals from across South Asia.

By this time, I had realised what I truly wanted. More than anything that my ambition demanded from me, what I wanted was to spend time with my parents and with the thoughts surfacing from my core. I had spent the five previous years groping in a deep, dark tunnel. Perhaps what I was going through was a tug of war between my emotions and my intellect whose surface was only slowly being scratched. Perhaps what I was going through was an understanding of my place in the world and a preparation for stepping into it with some purpose. This sense of groping led me to seek skills that were not a part of my ambitions in my growing up years, namely reading, writing and storytelling. Until this time, I was largely a product of the image-oriented generation. This groping... it made me feel a need for a culture that I could call my own. It set me off on trips to Jammu on my own and with my parents to meet with our relatives, to record experiences of an eyewitness of the 1947 attack as well as of a relative who travelled across the Line of Control from Srinagar to Muzaffarabad when a bus service connected the two cities in 2005 for the first time in more than fifty years.

Most importantly, the journey within has given me a sense of belonging to something beyond "home" and to a great extent, calmed the conflict within.

This awareness has opened a channel of communication between my parents and me. While my thought and action may not be sufficient yet to change some deep-rooted perceptions and experiences about conflict their generation lives with, we have grown to communicate peacefully and that, I feel, is success.

Journeys without

Occasionally, I face the wrath of the "other" that resides within one's own psyche. In my case, it is the "other" of ambition! What contains it, however, is the realisation that there is no greater contentment than the experience of a personal transformation towards peace. For me, this transformation mostly took place through the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop experiences.

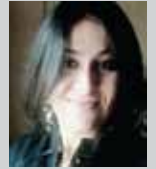
All I can share for now is this beginning of my story. My political opinions are still being shaped. Now that I have physically stepped out of “home”, I am more aware and better prepared to take on external journeys towards peace. Ironically though, I now feel more homeward bound than ever!

That which has changed within me will, I hope, be communicated through my life and work in the next

few years. So that I will be able to participate in our collective journey towards peace.

~

Smriti Vij is presently based in Mumbai, India, where she is looking to develop an independent career in scriptwriting and film-making.





LOVE & LONGING IN CHENNAI

ISHTIAQ ALI MEKHRI

Crossing borders is usually fun and excitement, but not the horizons of India and Pakistan! The great divide between the two has been mired in blood for the last six decades and human sentiment is the least addressed issue. The region is home to millions of divided families whose movements and mingling in the thick and thin of their lives rest on the whims and wishes of a callous bureaucracy.

To the deep south of India

My immediate ancestors come from Chennai (Madras), India. After the partition of the subcontinent in the late 1940s, my father chose to make Pakistan his home. Since that time, not much has transpired between us and our roots in the deep south of India.

In 1999, however, a joyful event provided my family with an opportunity to visit India. The heavens had smiled on me for it was my wedding with a cousin in Chennai. As our family on both sides of the divide prepared for the grand meeting – the first of its kind in the decades since my father ventured into the “enterprising” territory of Pakistan – the year 1999 came to be a watershed in India-Pakistan relations. It was the season of the Kargil misadventure. Tensions across the border were high and propaganda warfare at its best. Travelling into either side of the divide was not only discouraged but considered suspicious as well.

Visa for the journalist bridegroom

All said and done, however, we seemed destined to make the journey. Preparations for the whirlwind visit began with a short-listing of accompanying family members and friends, considered a necessary part of the bridegroom’s party. At this point, many – who were otherwise eager to cross the great divide – opted out as they saw little prudence in staking their good name and service profile by venturing to the other side of the partitioned subcontinent. Among them were a couple of family friends and uncles as well as a brother-in-law, all of whom were in government or quasi-government services. The list of probables finally stood at 11 and included an uncle recently retired from the national airlines. He was keeping his fingers crossed as I travelled all the way from Karachi to Islamabad to obtain visas for us.

To this day, I can recall vividly my appointed meeting with the then First Secretary (Visa) at the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. I remember him holding

my bundle of 11 passports in his hand and pondering over my enthusiasm to travel to Chennai with my family entourage to marry a girl from, of course, his motherland.

Just as the First Secretary called his Visa Counsel into the room and picked up a pen to scribble his orders, I interrupted. I had to point out that one of the 11 passports in his hand was that of a person lately retired from quasi-government service. “Would the Secretary be generous enough to grant him a visa?” I requested. The First Secretary looked up at me and said in a jovial tone, “No, I do not mind issuing a visa to a retired government employee. Shouldn’t I be much more concerned about the journalist bridegroom?” We laughed together for a while.



Ishtiaq Ali Mekhri (extreme right) with Indian participants Monica Wahi, Rangita Bali Waikhom & B.Rajeshwari at *Dialogic Engagement*, the Third Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, 2004

Emotional arrivals

Our entourage set off from Karachi to Chennai. It was divided into two groups, of which the ones who would take the train – the most tiring and cumbersome mode of travelling, in my opinion – was headed by me. My father and young sister – then expecting a child – travelled by air.

My father, who was visiting his motherland for the first time after he crossed into Pakistan in late 1948, was delighted to see his dream realised. He was eagerly looking forward to a grand get-together with his childhood friends, family members and acquaintances. It was to be a perfect *déjà vu*! He later disclosed to us that he had been in tears as his aircraft touched down at the Chatrapati Shivaji International Airport in Bombay.

Bridging missing links

Our stay in Chennai for the solemnisation of the wedding was one full of fear of the unknown. All sorts of rumours were doing the rounds. Some warned that we should “get out” of India as soon as possible since war loomed large. Some others felt that we had risked too much in coming all the way to Chennai in the first place. We should have picked a matrimonial alliance in Pakistan itself, they advised, as marrying an Indian would not be feasible. The wedlock would land in problems, we were forewarned, as the couple would live on either side of the geographical divide. So on and so forth.

Nonetheless, the cheers and hugs of friends and relatives in Chennai bridged the long missing link. Even so, we realised how short-lived the reunion was. Millions on both sides of the divide continue to live with the hope that the barbed wire would be opened one day and that their movements would not be subject to bureaucratic whims.

Sad farewells

After less than two weeks in Chennai, we packed to leave for home in Karachi. As we were counting down before rushing to the Chennai Central Railway Station, we realised that my father was missing from the scene. We wondered where he could be.

He arrived at the eleventh hour, but looked down and dejected. “Baba, where were you?” I asked and all eyes turned towards him as he started to speak. He had been to the graveyard, he narrated, to say farewell to his parents. As he uttered these words, the atmosphere among us turned sad. “I do not know whether I will be able to come back and pay homage at their graves ever again,” my father wondered. His words turned out to be prescient and my father died a few years later in Karachi. Perhaps with a wish to travel back to India once more.

~



Ishtiaq with his father, Baquir Ali Mekhri, on his wedding day in Chennai (July 1st, 1999)

Ishtiaq Ali Mekhri works as News Editor with GEO TV in Karachi, Pakistan.





THE POLITICS OF BEING AND BECOMING

RADHIKA GOVINDA

I was born in a small town called Baroda in the western Indian state of Gujarat. My mother is from Gujarat. My father is what people in Baroda call a “Madrasi”. Well, he isn’t actually from Madras (now Chennai). Still, it was explained to me several times that ordinary people in Gujarat considered anyone from the other (southern) side of the Vindhya Ranges (in central India) to be a “Madrasi”.

Of being “the other”

The only child of my parents, I largely grew up in New Delhi. We speak Gujarati at home. When we visited my mother’s side of the family in Gujarat every winter, I was regularly told that I ate using all my fingers. Like a “Madrasi” does. I was also told that I did not share their Gujarati sense of humour.

Yet, my sense of being “the other” was much less pronounced in Gujarat than in the southern Indian state of Karnataka when I visited my father’s side of the family with my parents every summer. Long skirts, bangles and the bindi were a must there and if I did not have a set on when I stepped off the train at the Bangalore railway station, I was handed one the moment I had stepped into the house. Since I spoke neither Tamil nor Kannada, I had to be spoken to in English (at the time, few of my cousins spoke Hindi). I was constantly nagged about my inability to speak Tamil and Kannada. I should learn to speak my father’s language, they said. In stubborn rebellion, I never did.

At school in Delhi, however, I discovered that I was not the only one with parents from different regional and/or cultural backgrounds. I was also not alone in being the only child. Of course, I was still asked whether I would not like a sibling. I still got told that being an only child, I must surely be spoilt.

Unlike most children my age, however, I looked forward to going to school. Mostly, it was an enjoyable experience for me although teachers and students alike perceived me to be quite the studious type.

When I was twelve, my parents and I moved to Paris where I attended an international school for two years. The new school environment came as a culture shock. The parents of every second classmate of mine were divorced or separated. The children spoke ill of their

step-parents. In spite of the international environment, I was often asked about the dark tone of my skin. Did I not shower regularly, they wanted to know. In geography, we were taught that people die at temperatures of 42 degrees Celsius. When I told the teacher that people in India live through such heat each year, the class looked at me bewildered.

When we returned from Paris, I rejoined my old school in Delhi and continued to stand out. For, I spoke to the boys. Every day, the group of girls in my class claimed that I was flirting with a new boy whereas I was only talking to boys with the same ease as with girls and in the same way I had in Paris.

This badge of being “different”

It was during these years of adolescence that I started to wear with much pride this badge of being “different”. It did not matter that I did not belong. I quite liked being different. I did not have to try to be different; it seemed to come to me almost naturally!

The construction of identity, writes Edward Said, the Palestinian American literary theorist, involves establishing “the other”. I always felt like “the other”. This sense of otherness has played a defining role in shaping the person I am now.

Fascination with otherness

It was this fascination with issues surrounding identity and otherness that led me to apply for a student exchange



Radhika Govinda (standing, fifth from left) at the First Conflict Transformation Workshop, *Rehumanising the Other*, June 2001.

programme to Kinnaird College, Lahore (Pakistan) as a second-year undergraduate student at the Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Delhi. I had grown up hearing about Pakistan-India relations and the Kashmir issue. Hailing from a middle-class family background, of social scientist parents, these were precisely the kind of issues that formed the meat of our dinner table conversations.

Supporting the Pakistani team in a cricket match was considered anti-national by several of my friends, who also celebrated India's conduct of nuclear tests in 1998. India has finally proved her might vis-à-vis her neighbours, some said. Even so, I held on to the belief that common people on the other side of the border would be just as human, as friendly, as peace-loving as I imagined common people in India to be.

From the “other” side

When the opportunity to explore these notions presented itself, I was naturally keen to grab it. To make sure that I was on the flight to Lahore as part of the student exchange programme and that I saw the Wagah-Attari border between the two countries from the Pakistani side.

Visiting Pakistan was the culmination of a much cherished dream. It also brought home the reality that identity and otherness are indeed two sides of the same coin. I found my Pakistani hosts to be extremely warm-hearted and caring. I was touched by the hospitality they extended to me and my friends from Delhi.

Yet, I also found the camps to be clearly demarcated in any debate on Pakistan-India relations. While my Pakistani and Indian friends wanted the issues of conflict to be amicably resolved, it was as if we could not help but support the official stance taken by our respective governments. And so, I suddenly found myself supporting the right-wing Hindu nationalist leader and then Prime Minister of India, A.B. Vajpayee in Pakistan!

Clearly, identity and otherness surfaced differently in different circumstances!

Seeking answers

This very interest – emerging from the experiences and circumstances of the social, political and cultural worlds I inhabit – led me to explore issues of identity and otherness even in my doctoral research, wherein I focused on the contemporary women's movement in India.

The movement has been strongly criticised by women activists from Dalit and religious minority communities for being dominated by upper-caste Hindu women, who stand at the helm. My research involves the case study of a grassroots women's organisation in rural Uttar Pradesh in northern India that engages with both Dalit and Muslim women, and, focuses on the new challenges that arise from such engagement. The organisation began its work with Muslim women in the aftermath of the communal carnage in Gujarat in 2002. In a society fragmented on the basis of caste, class and religious identities, as is the case with Uttar Pradesh, Muslims have come to be considered “the other” by Hindu Dalit and Hindu upper-caste women alike. Can the NGO then create a sense of collective identity among Dalit and Muslim women by means of activism? Can marginality be sufficient for Dalit and Muslim women to experience a sense of solidarity?

I continue to seek answers to these challenging questions of identity and otherness through my research.

~

Radhika Govinda is a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Cambridge, UK.





IN EVERYDAY LIFE

B.RAJESHWARI

It was October 1, 2005 and I was at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, to attend WISCOMP's ten-day Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Envisioning Futures*. I had reached the venue five minutes ahead of the scheduled time and had brought along a whole range of unanswered questions about the content and participants of the Workshop. At this point, I was quite confused and without much conceptual clarity about the notion of "conflict transformation".

Questions of inequality

Before I proceed further, let me share with you some details of my origin. I am 28, a woman, born in a middle-class Tamil Brahmin family in India and have completed most of my higher education in Delhi. Hailing from a family that gives ample importance to education, I was provided the right opportunities to acquire degrees. Therefore, I never seriously pondered over the question of gender equality until I went to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi for my Master's degree. University education did open up some of the more visible forms of gender inequality, yet these were often confined to analyses of United Nations' human development indices. It was my participation in WISCOMP's Workshop that brought out the not-so-visible aspects of this inequality to my notice.

Initiating a process

As I stepped into the conference hall on that first day of the Workshop, I carried with me the baggage of



B.Rajeshwari (middle) with Stuti Bhatnagar of WISCOMP (left) and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Programme Officer, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Islamabad (right) at the Conflict Transformation Workshop

cynicism. I was skeptical of anything significant transpiring over the ten days of the Workshop that could change my preconceived opinions on issues.

Prior to the Workshop, I would often ask myself, "Exactly what could happen among a small group of Indians and Pakistanis that might bring about significant changes in the existing relationship between the two countries?" I got my answer in the very first introductory session of the Workshop where it was clearly stated that no change could be brought in a short span of time. That the idea was simply to initiate a *process* that would eventually strengthen the desire for peace.

Unexpected introductions

Shock jolted me when I first saw the women participants from Pakistan. They were walking down the lobby towards the conference hall wearing short, bright *kurtis* and flaunting their *juttis*; their hair was fashionably colored and the make up was impeccable! I was a little taken aback!

Of course, I did not expect them to be clad in all-encompassing *burkhas*. Nevertheless, I must confess, neither did I imagine them in the most fashionable of clothes. To be honest, the next thought in my mind was this: that these women were, perhaps, here to party; that, perhaps, they would not be able to speak anything sensible during the Workshop.

Well, during the course of the Workshop, not only was I forced to change my opinion about them, but I also came to admire their ability to beautifully articulate their points of view. This, then, was my introduction to one of the most amazing groups of Pakistani men and women.

Engendering peace

For me, it was also an introduction to the world of conflict transformation and to the beginning of my engagement with WISCOMP, both of which eventually brought forth a vista of knowledge on conflict and gender. This experience helped me overcome a number of conflicting situations in my personal and professional lives and particularly helped me in my dealings with people and relationships.

WISCOMP introduced the phrase *engendering peace* into my vocabulary. With regard to the positive role played by women in peacebuilding, the approach

adopted by WISCOMP was that of slowly converting the unconverted to an acknowledgment of women's contributions. Now, when I discuss gender inequality with my husband, the idea of converting the as-yet unconverted always lingers at the back of my mind.

What the Conflict Transformation Workshops have taught are these: the need to carve a niche for one's self and the ability to transform a hostile environment into one where the self's individuality is not compromised. The different stories of peace initiatives that women shared at the Workshop have enabled me to think and work positively in situations of conflict.

Women's roles, however, are not always positive in situations of conflict and peace. While acknowledging the need to learn from women's unique experiences of conflict and the necessity to involve them in peace processes, I remember asking a Workshop resource person about our position on women who cater to violence and believe in armed conflict. I realised then that women also acquire patriarchal roles during conflict situations and often equate power with their ability to take up arms. Nevertheless, this does not negate the fact that women's experiences of conflict are different and unique and that their perspective needs to be included if a peace process is to be sustainable.

A space for herself

My experiences with women, both in my family and in the outside world, have strengthened my theory that women are not a homogenous group. Every woman responds to gender inequality in her own unique way. A number of my women friends experience paradoxical situations within the family wherein their higher education is encouraged not as an instrument of liberation but as a device that would make them more attractive in the "arranged marriage" market. Faced with such a situation, every woman tackles the problem differently.

At this point, I would like to share with you the story of a very close friend who has been constantly negotiating her space within her family and in the wider world.

Priya was married at the young age of 21 years (when she was still pursuing her Bachelor's degree) into a family her parents knew for years. Although she was rather unwilling to enter into marriage at that early age, it was agreed that it was only "natural" for her parents to get her married.

As a result, Priya suddenly found herself in a small town near Chennai in southern India and in a completely new environment, which included staying in a joint family. After giving birth to two children, Priya slowly started negotiating with her husband and family members to allow her to pursue her education. After a couple of years of negotiation, she was allowed to finish her Bachelor's and later her Master's degree as well. Presently, Priya works as a school teacher in her town and has been teaching for sixteen years now. At every step along the way, she devised unique mechanisms to carve a space for herself.

A continuous process

It is fascinating to study the application of different tools of conflict transformation by women in their everyday life. As women, I think, we are constantly involved in the art of negotiation, resolution and transformation. The ability to understand and to recognise these skills in each of us is my learning from WISCOMP's Conflict Transformation Workshops.

While writing these reflections on gender and conflict transformation, my thoughts drifted back to the Alumni Workshop of 2006. Before the Workshop formally began, I was looking closely at everyone around me. I knew most of the participants from previous WISCOMP CT Workshops. I realised that the two years in-between had transformed all of us. There was a marked change in our thought processes as well. Conflict transformation is, indeed, a continuous process. Which, for me, can never end.

~

Rajeshwari is a Doctoral Scholar at the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.





GATHERERS OF NEW FRUIT

MEENAKSHI CHHABRA

“Self requires the existence of the other... It is by recognising that which is different from and external to ourselves, sensing the resistance it offers, that we are inspired to exercise the self-mastery that brings our humanity to fruition. To lose sight of the other is, thus, to undermine our full experience of self.”

– Daisaku Ikeda (b. 1928)
President, Soka Gakkai International, Tokyo

Stories of victims & villains

I was born and brought up in the north of India. The India-Pakistan conflict was a big part of my growing up narrative. My grandparents and parents had moved from present-day Pakistan to India as refugees during the partition of British India in 1947. From them, I constantly heard accounts of the partition and of how it had forever altered my family's history. I heard stories of the loss of loved ones, of the end of childhood and youthful dreams, of the helplessness that comes with not having enough to eat. I heard their experiences of hunger and poverty as refugees in a new land. For my family, then, “the other” (namely, Pakistan and the people who lived there) were the enemy who had brought this suffering upon them.

In these conversations on the partition, however, I never heard about what happened to “the other side”. Somewhere amid hearing all these stories and demonising the other, my young mind shut itself off from hearing anything else about “the other side”. I categorised this “other” – Pakistan and its people – as the enemy who *must* be hated because they had robbed my country of her land, and my family of their home. They were responsible for my mother's lost childhood and my father's lost dreams. These feelings of hatred for “the other” were further fuelled and justified by the media, and the history that I was taught in school.

A reversal of roles

It was not till my mid-30s, when I moved to the United States, that I met someone from Pakistan for the first

time. Was this the enemy that I had been warned about? We looked the same, enjoyed the same kind of food, the same movies and songs! Even our spoken language was the same! I felt like I was meeting someone from back home. Only one thing was missing: we never talked about our histories, religions and politics; and, we never talked about the partition. It felt safer that way.

However, a curiosity lingered as to what the other side thought about these issues. I decided to explore this interest academically. As a part of my Master's thesis and doctoral research, I explored the perceptions of Pakistanis about the partition. As a part of my research, I interviewed many Pakistanis from across three generations about their understanding of the partition and what the event meant to them.

For the first time, I heard about the pain and suffering their side had experienced during the partition of 1947. It was a humbling experience for me to hear the same stories that I had heard from my father. There was nostalgia in the stories, a longing to go back, the same disbelief at the final reality of the partition and the same hope that one would be able to return after “things settled down”. There were perpetrators and victims in these stories too, only the roles had been switched. In their stories, it was my side that had looted and brutally killed their loved ones. It was my side that was responsible for the loss of their home and family. My research proved to be a personally transformative experience. In the process of listening to their stories and witnessing



Meenakshi Chhabra conducts an Education for Peace workshop with WISCOMP at The Shri Ram School, Gurgaon, India

their tears, I had allowed “the other” to enter my consciousness in a new way. I felt a connection and empathy for the enemy other.

New connections, new conversations

It became important to me that other Indians and Pakistanis also experience such meaningful encounters with each other. In 1999, I initiated the first dialogue on the India-Pakistan conflict between Indian and Pakistani women living in the Boston area in the United States.

Ever since, I – together with a Pakistani friend who I met here in Boston – have continued to actively encourage Indian and Pakistani women and youth (both in the Boston area and in India and Pakistan) to engage in conversations on difficult issues.

Themes similar to my own have emerged in these conversations. Often enough, there was anger and frustration as to whose historical and political narratives were right. While there was no agreement on the political narrative of the conflict, the sharing of personal narratives – family stories of loss and suffering during the partition – brought a sense of connectedness and resulted in a reaching out to the other side.

I still vividly remember one of the workshops involving women from both countries. A participant shared a story about a Muslim woman she knew, one who had migrated from India to Pakistan during the partition. This woman had a son and a daughter, both of whom had to be carried as they were very young and could not walk miles to cross the border. The woman could not carry both her children and was faced with the difficult choice of taking only one of them with her. She decided to carry her son across and left her daughter behind to face her destiny. The narrator reported that the woman thinks about her daughter to this day and wonders what happened to her. She lives everyday with the pain of having abandoned her child. The story moved us all. We talked about the inhumanity of war and its brutal effects on women, even forcing a mother to make such a hard choice. At that moment, it was not about being Indian or Pakistani. It was, instead, about sharing the suffering of women, and deeply connecting through this sharing of suffering. It was about remembering the suffering in a way that it does not happen again.

New fruits

What has been painful during this process is witnessing the frustrations and fears of youth about the conflict and their longing for peace. I have asked myself many times: what are we leaving as a legacy for our children? It is disturbing to see their youthful energies being spent on harbouring feelings of hate. Feelings nourished by the stories they have been told, and by the forces of politics and history outside their control. Yet, in the midst of this, it has also been encouraging and inspiring to see the courage of youth who are engaging with each other on difficult issues of the conflict and connecting with each other through the sharing of personal stories.



Meenakshi Chhabra stands adjacent to what used to be part of her father's home in Pakistan

I have experienced the transformative power of encountering "the other" by engaging in these conversations myself and by witnessing many encounters of honest sharing. This journey with "the other" has been a process of inner dialogue with my self. It has given me the courage to expose my tacit assumptions about "the other" in the hope of truly understanding them. It has accorded me the strength to re-examine the politics of my mind and become less afraid of inner opposition. It has meant transforming feelings of hate and revenge into the ability to see my profound connection with "the other". This connection affirms my need for "the other" in making peace, just as I need this "other" to sustain the conflict. Through this process I have found immense hope in the possibilities for the transformation of the human heart and mind.

I am reminded of the Nigerian author Ben Okri's poem, *Mental Fight* that echoes these very possibilities:

Already I can hear this distant music
Of the future,
The magic poetry of time,
The distillation of all our different gifts.

Will you be at the harvest,
Among the gatherers of new fruits?
Then you must begin today to remake
Your mental and spiritual world,
And join the warriors and celebrants
Of freedom, realisers of great dreams.

~

Meenakshi Chhabra is presently with
Lesley University, Cambridge, USA.





NO LONGER ANONYMOUS

MARIA SAIFUDDIN EFFENDI

My nine-year experience of study and work in the field of peace and conflict resolution has resulted in a definition of *peace* as a feeling that emerges from within one's self. To me, neither is peace the condition of the absence of war nor is it good relations with neighbouring or "enemy" countries. Alternatively, peace is a state of mind that assures security and love; that assures contentment with and calmness towards fellow beings, regardless of boundaries or religions. This feeling is accompanied by a reciprocal reception of similar emotions from the other.

Exactly how did I achieve this feeling of peace towards my Indian counterparts? The feeling emerged from the experiences of exploring and living with my Indian fellows both at the academic and personal levels. My definition of peace especially emerged from the close and personal encounters I had with young Indians through two academic channels: the Sixth Winter Workshop of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (Sri Lanka) in Kathmandu, Nepal in 2004 and WISCOMP's Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Envisioning Futures* in New Delhi, India in 2005.

Manika's welcome

Kathmandu became the gateway of my golden memories of new friendships across the borders. Of forging lifelong bonds of love and affection. And, of experiencing what I had never heard or thought of previously.

I was preparing to attend the Sixth Winter Workshop of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) in Kathmandu in October 2004. Before travelling to Nepal, my mind was jumbled with a million thoughts. It was continuously and inquisitively at work. I had always wanted to know about Indians. I was excited as well as curious about the experience of spending ten days with the very Indians I had been hearing and reading about since my childhood. How would they behave? I wondered. How would they treat me? Would they think of me as an "enemy"?

The first Indian I met and befriended at Kathmandu was my roommate Manika Rakshit, a pretty damsel from Kolkata. As my flight had been delayed, I reached Kathmandu later than expected and too irritated and tired to do anything constructive. But my tiredness and irritation evaporated the moment I was welcomed by Manika with a warm, friendly smile. She greeted me with

a bar of chocolate and enquired about my tiresome journey. Her warmth instantly wiped away my exhaustion and irritation! She started talking to me as if we had known each other for long. I still remember the bar of Cadbury's chocolate that she gave me! This friendly gesture wholly won my heart and suddenly transformed my thinking process. My curiosity was a little satisfied at this point but I was still wondering about my experiences to come in the days ahead.



Maria Effendi (centre) enjoys lunch and conversation with fellow participants at *Envisioning Futures*, the Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, 2005

Meeting Tanya

During the same workshop, I became good friends with Tanya Mohan, another Indian and we are, till this day, happy and proud of our friendship beyond borders. At that time, Tanya worked with the New Delhi-based Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, a leading Indian think-tank on security under the Ministry of Defence. I was then associated with the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad, an independent, non-profit research centre devoted to the study of the region around Pakistan. Our academic conversations during and after the workshop led us to think beyond the stereotypes in, and rhetoric of, international media on all things South Asian. Through these informal dialogues with each other, we exchanged messages of peace.

Later, during my visits to India, I stayed with Tanya's family and never felt unfamiliar around them. I am like a daughter to Tanya's parents and to my parents, Tanya is a part of our family. Our late night chats, our outings and dinners together, all played their part in building the confidence that we now have in each other. Tanya is a close friend of mine in India and we remain well-informed about each other.

The WISCOMP experience

The RCSS Workshop brought me another sincere friend, Anisha Kinra, and WISOMP further strengthened this friendship as we both participated in the Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Envisioning Futures* in New Delhi in October 2005. Although we do not get enough opportunities to see each other often, we remain good friends and plan to work on joint projects in the future. WISCOMP gifted me another gem in the form of Anuradha Choudry who I am proud to have as my best buddy.

The RCSS and WISCOMP experiences have helped me forge lovely bonds across the border. We have become lifelong friends, relating not only on the professional front but through personal relationships as well. The stereotypical notions I harboured before attending the RCSS Workshop in 2004 have been dwindling, thanks to the experiences of living and studying with my Indian counterparts in Kathmandu and Delhi. To me, WISCOMP is like a home where Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath is like an affectionate mother. Manjri, Stuti and Manisha are like loving friends who take great care of us. This home is an open platform where we can speak our minds and hearts without restrictions. We study, learn and enjoy together here.

My experiences in the field of peace and conflict transformation reveal the importance of dialogue, communication and interaction at the grassroots' level. Here, I would like to give the example of WISCOMP's organisational effort in having an Indian and a Pakistani share a room during their residential workshops in New Delhi. I still recall my late night chats on various issues with roommate Anuradha. This experience of living together provides a reciprocal learning greater than that which can be obtained from books and is a useful tool to build trust and confidence among academicians and students. My list of Indian friends does not end here, but I would like to mention Navjot Bir Singh and Seema Sridhar here. I love them!

These good experiences with Indians do not mean that there were no hurdles. I have also met Indians who were suspicious of me because I was a Pakistani. I have tried to bridge the communication gap with them but in vain.

However, one finds good and bad people everywhere, regardless of their country or origin. So, this is not a matter over which we must give up our hope for peace through interaction and dialogue.

I could never be "afraid" of India or Indians anymore. I feel sure and confident of my identity and have experienced the feeling of peace *within* me. This confidence comes from my sense of security in my Pakistani identity and from the love and affection of my Indian friends. Our experience of living with each other would, surely, have left a positive impact on them as well. And, they may have learnt that we Pakistanis are not quite as "bad" as the media portrays us to be!

Celebrating our differences

India and Pakistan are heterogeneous societies with rich cultural, ethnic and linguistic fabrics. We are two countries with a fantastic mixture of peoples and cultures! There are some similarities in our cultural and social settings because we have lived together for centuries. But this is not to say that we are the same. We should identify, recognise and accept each other as two different nations and learn to coexist with these differences. To me, being different is the root of learning, a tool of survival and a law of growth. We *should* learn from our differences. To be *different* is better than to be *indifferent* and I have chosen to love human beings of all religious and cultural backgrounds. India and Indians are no exception to this circle of love and affection!

~

Maria Saifuddin Effendi is currently pursuing her M.A. in Conflict Resolution at the University of Bradford, UK.



No Longer Anonymous, the title of Maria's story, is an idea borrowed from another alumnae story by Anisha Kinra and Seema Sridhar (both of whom are mentioned in this story). In *First Steps & Giant Leaps*, they write, "People from across the border were no more anonymous identities. They now had faces, names and a place in our hearts."



SINGING THE SAME SONGS

KHADIJA AMJAD

When I first arrived in the United States in 2005, an Indian classmate from college put his arm around my shoulder at a party and said, "Khadija, I never thought I would be standing this close to a Pakistani!" I suspect that he had downed a few that evening. But a year and a half later, it was heartening to see the same friend write a story for a spoof Bollywood flick featuring a romance between an Indian and a Pakistani that somehow resolves the Kashmir issue! We aired this Follywood Films Production at college to much acclaim.

Among Pakistani and Indian students of international affairs and public policy, I have always felt a high degree of appreciation for how far we have been able to move head as generation-Y South Asians by putting our past behind us. And, importantly, to its credit, I have seen generation-Y taking the liberty to be unabashedly bold about the same.

The baggage of history

For the longest time, I found the Gate Closing Ceremony at the Wagah-Attari border between Pakistan and India to be absolutely fascinating. This was so not because of the event in itself, but owing to the looks on the faces of the people who came to witness this ceremony on both sides, Pakistani and Indian.

As the ceremony unfolded, the reflection of wonder, excitement and thrill in the eyes of all present made it appear as if they were seeing an entirely new species on the other side! This mood, while being awkwardly funny, is also deeply telling of other underlying issues. The expressions of the Pakistani and Indian people at this daily ceremony seemed to me to symbolise all the historical baggage we have learnt to carry since 1947.

Shedding the burden

For me, personally, interacting with Indians willing to take that very hard first step towards understanding "the other" went a long way in shedding the burden. This was, in part, due to WISCOMP's Conflict Transformation Workshop *Transcending Conflict* in 2003, especially the design of the Workshop sessions.

The non-judgmental atmosphere and the candid interactions made the participants open up slowly. The Workshop atmosphere ensured that we moved away

from the comforts of diplomatic conduct to talk about hard issues with all the informality that college students are accustomed to. Most importantly, we were able to make lasting, meaningful friendships that continue to be important in our lives. In addition to being able to sing the same songs, watch the same television shows and wear the same clothes, we were, significantly, also able to share the same career plans and dreams for the future.



Khadija Amjad (left) at the Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, *Transcending Conflict*, 2003

The most palpable change that came about in the years that followed my participation in WISCOMP's Conflict Transformation Workshop was my perception of India. The country was no longer a monolithic entity swirling in anti-Pakistan sentiment and Bharatiya Janata Party rhetoric. Now, it was also about the Indian friends I had come to cherish and the personal experiences that had – slowly, but surely – allowed me to create my own reality.

Our generation may be the best positioned yet to bring about lasting stability in the subcontinent. And, may I also humbly submit that it is not in spite of the sacrifices of our elders and preceding generations, but because of them that we also owe it to the bright future that awaits us all.

~

Khadija Amjad is a Research Assistant at Harvard Law School, Cambridge, USA.



IT HAS TO BE US

MUNA BAIG & JYOTIRMOY CHAUDHURI



JYOTIRMOY...

My first impressions

It has been a long time since the first WISCOMP Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Rehumanising the Other*, which I attended in 2001. I was a wild card entry to the Workshop. I had finished my Master's degree with an okay grade; the next academic step and life beyond were in limbo, when a friend leaving for London (and thus unable to attend the Workshop) sent me off to the WISCOMP programme instead.

I landed at the preliminary meeting of the Indian participants (in the Jacaranda Hall at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi) and found quite a large gathering seated at the roundtable. All around me, there was an incredible sense of poise. Most of the young participants around me seemed to know exactly who they were and what they wanted to say. I still remember some faces from that gathering: Prerona Prasad, Shreya Jani and Manjri Sewak. Still remember all those first impressions of the day.

Among my most powerful remembrances of the Workshop that followed were of the people involved in the process. I felt elated sitting among my peers with their strong sense of purpose and all *that* energy! There, at the Workshop, we were being told that we had the rights *and* the wherewithal to change the direction of the strained relationship with our neighbours, the Pakistanis.

Peeling off the layers

I have always considered myself something of a "Pak expert", whatever one understands by that term. I grew up with a fixation of sorts on Pakistan.

Our extended clan was a pretty mixed one, with a number of castes and creeds intermingling. There is a favourite aunt who moved first from Bhopal to Karachi, later to Birmingham, then London and later married my uncle. Older generations in the family had served in the army and so, stories and photographs of Quetta and Peshawar were common. Then there was the literature, both in English and Bengali, about the romantic Far North. Lahore was always that cultured city you *had* to visit, and in my imagination, Kabul was also near.

Next came the introduction to Kashmir. My father was a surgeon in the Indian Army and had done close to four

tenures in Jammu & Kashmir. The state was always present in our lives. There were also two long holidays with my father there. There were always letters coming in from Kashmir. In 1989 and the years afterwards, the situation in the Valley was quite bad. We used to worry constantly. We lived far away in West Bengal in the east of India and back then, one did not quite use the telephone the way we do now.

The Conflict Transformation Workshop in 2001 was the first time I actively untied these strands, peeled off layers of romantic illusions and saw the whole picture with clarity. For example, I realised that in my growing-up years, Pakistan was never "real"; it was always part of a greater, beautiful India where all castes and creeds lived happily ever after. So, at the 2001 Workshop, consciously pegged Pakistan as a vibrant, developing country in its own right, albeit with similar problems and misconceptions of their own regarding India. It was my meeting with the post-Partition, post-1971 generation of Pakistanis and Indians at the Workshop that changed the way I looked at things.

MUNA...

The-other-who-must-be-addressed-now

It was during this process of unknitting pre-conceived notions with a bright group of the post-1971 generation that Jyoti and I discovered how many of our questions and thoughts veered on the same plane. Unlike Jyoti's initial romantic notion of Pakistan, I had always been made to see India as the neighbouring country that was never going to be a friend. Like Jyoti, I too realised that "the other side" was a vibrant, developing country in its own right.

I had just finished studying the global environmental crisis at university and was all gung-ho about campaigning for global unity in the face of impending calamities such as climate change. It was at this time that I got the opportunity to discover and address that very idealistic notion of unity of interests with a country that simply did not seem to want to be friends. Sharing a similar geography meant that I saw the same faces from the other side at the Workshop with a shared love for cricket, Bollywood films, *mughlai* cuisine and *barsaat ki pehli baarish* (the first burst of the monsoon). Shared cultural unity was, however, not enough to bring regional unity. It was not enough to bring positive change either.

IT HAS TO BE US

If that had been possible, it would have happened by now. And, we would not have been sitting together as we were at the Workshop in New Delhi that summer of 2001. Although we were meeting to try and undo the ghosts of the partition and to dialogue with the-other-who-must-be-addressed-now for the sake of bringing a change in attitudes, I was left wondering if this was enough. I was left wondering whether the few moments – be it at the Taj Mahal in Agra or at Karim’s in Old Delhi – when we lowered our guards in the face of complete exhilaration in each other’s company were enough to bring about change. It seems to me like they were. Jyoti’s colourful family and my international take on the regional tension got us talking. His ideas about Pakistan would make me laugh but his sincerity towards peaceful coexistence made us friends for life.

New beginnings

Were these efforts enough to counter terrorism, the Kashmir issue and the age-old Muslim-Hindu rift? Not entirely, to be honest. Perhaps, they can never be. And this because it is not we who are rigid enough not to look beyond ourselves and at the vast opportunities that peace can bring to the region. It is not we who are unwilling to move ahead with hands held out to each other in a gesture marking new beginnings.

Yet, it is, perhaps, we who can bring that change eventually. It *has* to be us. I am very hopeful of it. I have been to India once more since 2001 and Jyoti has been earnestly promising to come to Lahore since the Workshop. We have been plotting to have me installed at some think-tank in Delhi so I can shop at Nalli’s and eat out at Karim’s to my heart’s content! So, I do believe it will be our generation, which will bring forth that elusive peace one day. I know we will. What do you think Jyoti?

JYOTIRMOY...

The need for harmony

Muna, which of my ideas about Pakistan made you laugh? Yes, it would be good to travel to Pakistan and see

it for myself. The trip to Lahore has to happen sometime soon. I also want to visit Murree, Quetta and Karachi.

Getting back to our peers from Pakistan... most of the connections made at the Workshop continued for quite a while afterwards, mainly through the internet. I met some participants again, such as Muna. Then there was Bilal Murtaza Siddiqui, a regular in Delhi since he has friends here. Over time, however, it has only been Muna who has been in touch.

Ours was a young group in 2001 with most participants on the verge of either higher studies or matrimony. So, most went their own ways. There were no projects or common action plans to bind us then. Maybe other participants made more working alliances and dealt with issues of peace hands-on. My notions of peace, however, remain in the realm of thought and imagination, one built from the knowledge gained through books and the internet. Yet, one likes to believe that it is the consciousness of the need for harmony that matters. It feels great when Muna says we are friends for life!

~

Muna Baig is based in London where she is currently in the process of qualifying as a solicitor.



Jyotirmoy Chaudhuri is associated with the Society for Aerospace Studies, New Delhi.



GENERATING CHANGE

DEEPTI MAHAJAN



I came. I saw. I stayed.

Making a difference

When I came to WISCOMP's Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Transcending Conflict* (2003) as a participant, I came with the hope of bringing new and diverse points of view to bear on my thinking and daily existence.

My understanding of *conflict transformation* was limited to the Concept Note circulated before the commencement of the Workshop. Having interacted with Pakistanis at an earlier India-Pakistan youth conference, I had been initiated into the process of understanding "the other" and the collective self: the similarities, the differences, the common ground, the common history, the intertwined present and interdependent future. I was looking forward to what tools *conflict transformation* and my interaction with the co-participants at the Workshop would offer me in order to make a difference in my own small way.

Beginning a transformative journey

Four years hence, I write this piece as a member of the WISCOMP team, as someone who has now closely lived the realities of the Conflict Transformation programme: the faith; the challenges; the patient, incremental growth. For me, it has truly been a transformative journey. The theory of *conflict transformation* has provided me the ground to sow seeds of hope in; an understanding of the practitioner's skills has given me one (if not *the*) answer to the ever so persistent "How?" in the realm of peacebuilding; and most importantly, through the widening circle of engagement and the infectious energy of the alumni group from India and Pakistan, I have learnt the lessons of sustained effort, hope and optimism.

Linking the generations

To me, the most striking component of the programme has been the timing of its initiation and early growth

which has ensured its engagement with the generation that lies at the interface: between the generation that lived through the partition and the younger generations to come. Many amongst the alumni of the Conflict Transformation Workshops have closely interacted with grandparents, and in some cases, parents, who have talked about the first-hand experience of the partition. This is the first generation that will parent children who will hear *only* secondary accounts of the partition – a historical fact that has been interpreted, re-interpreted and contorted till it has become a metaphor for all things undesirable (at least in India!). That the "narrators" form an informed and perceptive understanding of the events of 1947 is crucial to stopping the cycle of hatred and violence.

The focus on the generational approach has immense merits. Clearly, like other civil society initiatives in the area of peacebuilding, it seeks to transform public attitudes and encourage humane thinking which further has the two-pronged effect of establishing more peaceful intra-societal relationships and countering national jingoism.



Deepthi Mahajan (extreme left, seated) makes a point at a group discussion at *Collaborative Explorations*, the Fifth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, 2006

Secondly, it works with the long-term goal of reaching a critical mass of people which would significantly alter "prevalent public opinion" and set in motion large-scale political and societal changes.

Thirdly and interestingly, it works with the assumption that 20 years hence, when one of the persons "converted" by the programme or in

some way touched by its ideas, reaches the negotiating table, she will bring a radically different point of view to the discussions at the Track One level.

Investing in the process

Over the last few years, I have mulled over and discussed these possibilities very often with people from all walks of life, who want to know "exactly" how bringing together

a bunch of young people will alter the peace process between India and Pakistan".

Clearly, event-oriented war – complete with gore, blood, bombs and action – arouses much more interest and excitement than process-oriented peacebuilding. It is easy to blame the media for glorifying war through its visual and sound-byte culture. This may be one significant factor, but the larger process of socialisation is at play here, including our understanding of "patriotism", "power" and "development". The Conflict Transformation Workshops are a step towards transforming these notions, towards lending energy and currency to the *process* of building peace – along a long, winding road where a bend does not imply an end.

Facing the disappointments

Lately, when a young Indian political leader made a reference to the role of the then ruling party at the Centre in the creation of Bangladesh, I was greatly disappointed – almost angry. It shouldn't have surprised me for we are used to hearing our politicians speak of all kinds of faultlines – caste, religion, region, and nationality – to cash in on the sweep of sentiments, most of which find their origin in rampant ignorance, unreasonable stereotyping and the wieldy baggage of history. I was disappointed, in part because the politician made a reference to a bygone era when it was not called-for, because he provided hawks on both sides a chance to pounce upon and denounce efforts for peace.

But the reason for my disappointment did not lie precisely in what he said. It lay in who he is, or rather in how old he is. Here was a third-generation Indian politician invoking the events and attitudes of a bygone era, a leader who I expect to usher in an era of new politics – a progressive politics focused on peace and development. To me, the statement by the young leader struck at the heart of the Conflict Transformation project. "We, the young people of India and Pakistan..." how many times had I heard this statement being made during conferences, workshops, television chat shows and informal conversations. May be, I thought, it is time for us to deconstruct this *We* and see it for what it is – a group of *Is*, many of whom still revel in "putting in place" the neighbour. We may be talking peace, but

one-upmanship and aggrandisement figure prominently amongst our objectives.

Keeping the conversations going

I paused. To check the direction my thoughts were taking. Why was I letting one *I* overshadow the many other *Is* who stood for growth and dynamism? Wasn't I being unfair, unjustified, even irrational? Perhaps it is time to strengthen the *We* and bring into its fold many more *Is*. A concerted effort is required to reach out to people, both young and old. And since politicians will be politicians first and peace activists later, we need to work doubly hard to bring them *squarely* into the peace camp.

These are not new lessons. But the events and processes unfolding around us, remind us time and again of how important it is to make the journey to peace, to instill in ourselves an inclination to favour agreement and mutual well-being, and as a first step, hear and be heard in the true spirit of dialogue, beautifully captured by the Urdu writer Ali Sardar Jafri (1916-2000) when he wrote,

*'Guftgoo band na ho
Baat se baat chaley...
Be-basi harf ko zanjeer
Ba-paa kar naa sakey
Koi qatil ho magar
Qatal-e-nawaa kar naa sake...'*

'Keep the conversation going
One word leading to another...
Don't let words
Be stifled with helplessness.
Don't let voices be murdered...'

Let the conversations flow! Let the minds unfetter!
Let the circles grow!

~

Deepti Mahajan is a Research Associate at The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi. She previously served as Programme Associate at WISCOMP, New Delhi.



A MEETING OF 'ENEMIES'

NAUSHEEN WASI



Some years ago, a colleague encouraged me to apply for WISCOMP's Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Transcending Conflict* to be held in New Delhi in June 2003.

At that time, *conflict transformation* was a rather strange term to me. To be completely honest, I had no idea what it actually meant. Neither had I studied the discipline nor any related area such as Peace Studies or Conflict Resolution. I had not even bothered to read about this subject as I felt it was not in the vicinity of my interest areas. I had not realised then that it was, in fact, complementary to my field of study.

Nonetheless, being a student of South Asian politics (and being especially interested in regional cooperation), I took interest in visiting *the* country that was viewed as the major source of dissonance in the region. By then, I was studying conflict as only one of many impediments to regional cooperation.

New realisations

Being the kind of person who forms opinions on the basis of personal observations and findings gathered from primary sources, I thought the trip to Delhi would be a good opportunity to receive first-hand information. So I applied for the Conflict Transformation Workshop in 2003 and was fortunate enough to be selected.

At that time, relations between India and Pakistan were almost completely severed. The level of animosity was so high that there were no direct flights between the two countries. Travelling from Pakistan to India in the summer of 2003, we had to make a long journey. It took us almost 15 hours to cover the distance that would usually have taken no more than an hour and a half if there had been direct flights between Karachi and Delhi.

Even so, the detour proved useful and marked the beginning of a new realisation – at the Delhi Workshop – of the meaning and benefits of peace. On the wounds conflicts inflict and the need for transformation. Every day of the Workshop was a new experience wherein the feelings (both positive and negative) expressed by the South Asian participants completely changed my perceptions, imparting me with the vision to view things differently.

Eclipsed by conflict

On the fourth or fifth day of the Workshop, a film on Kashmir was screened and depicted people's sufferings following the conflict between India and Pakistan. I was looking around the hall during the screening and a Hindu Pandit woman caught my attention as she was crying over every visual on screen. Her tears moved me intensely. Following this incident, I could not help thinking about the misery of a common person, the beauty of whose entire life is eclipsed by such conflict. I could not help pondering on how important it was to have peace. Later, I learnt that the Pandit participant I had seen weeping had suffered not only due to the Kashmir conflict but, ironically, also because of her own family. She was helping Muslim women in Kashmir and this was not acceptable to her Hindu Pandit in-laws.

Somewhat similar dreams of life

I had grown up hearing about the Kashmir problem. Every day, I saw television footage of the brutalities Muslim families were bearing at the hands of the Indian army. There was always sensational news of Kashmir's "self determination" movement, which was known on the other side as the "insurgency". Now for the first time, I was exposed to new dimensions of the problem and the sufferings of "the other". The sufferings of victims on both sides were not sufferings for state interests. As I understand it, they were suffering for their homes, their relatives and for the association they share with the land they were born in and grew up in. I linked the plight of people on both sides of the border. To me, they were no more Muslims *and* Hindus; Indians *and* Pakistanis; us *and* them. They were but similar individuals cherishing somewhat similar dreams of life.

What came to my mind now was the worth of an individual, her life and the importance of her cherished dreams. *Not* the Pakistani or Indian version of the conflict or the state of relations between the two countries. Consequently, the importance of resolving the conflict increased many fold.

New definitions of peace

I started looking at issues of both conflict and peace rather differently. It is not that I do not regard conflict as a weighty matter of state business now. I do realise that competing national interests exist and that, at times, conflict is inevitable.

Nonetheless, I look at it with an altered perspective. My deliberations now revolve around new questions: what should peace mean to an individual? And, more importantly, what should it mean for the state? The second question becomes important because individuals become beneficiaries only if new definitions of peace are adopted at the state level.

In the classical sense of the term, *peace* is understood to be the absence of violent conflict. I agree that conflicts at the state level arise from a web of complex reasons. National interests are, often, too important to ignore. However, I believe that peace must include opportunities for all individuals to follow paths of their choice that lead to prosperity and pleasure.

In my opinion, peace is characterised by respect and goodwill. A state of peace does not translate into the acceptance of the rival's view or submission to the opponent's demand; it only means respect for "the other" and her views.

My experience at the Conflict Transformation Workshop helped me realise just how vital it was to understand the

positions and perspectives, the stakes and sufferings of the so-called "other" even before understanding one's own. For, such understanding helps move the conflicting parties towards a solution of the issue. One lesson for states in conflict is the need to understand the perspective of the "the other" while attempting to find a solution to the conflicting issue. Another is the need to deal peacefully with people under their jurisdiction during times of conflict.

Being a resident of the realist world, I conclude that conflicts will continue, but they must be tempered by a vision of peace as described here.

~

Nausheen Wasi is a Lecturer at the Department of International Relations, University of Karachi, Pakistan.



ONGOING CONVERSATIONS

MUNA BAIG & SOUMITA BASU



We met for the first time at WISCOMP's First Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop Rehumanising the Other, organised in New Delhi in 2001.

Then: Muna was studying in Kinnaird College, Lahore (Pakistan) and Soumita was a summer intern at WISCOMP, New Delhi (India).

Now: Muna is currently in the process of qualifying as a solicitor in London (UK) and Soumita is studying International Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth (UK).

We have remained in touch, meeting twice in New Delhi (at the First and Second Conflict Transformation Workshops, Rehumanising the Other and Transcending Conflict in 2001 & 2003 respectively) and many times since then in the UK. These days we usually meet in London's coffee shops. When we heard from WISCOMP about the collaborative project, Closer to Ourselves: Stories from the Journey towards Peace in South Asia, we sat down with our cups of coffee one sunny afternoon, and talked about the difference that the Conflict Transformation Workshops have made to our lives...

Muna: Soumita, you were working as an intern with WISCOMP at the time of the first Workshop in 2001. How was that experience?

Soumita: The preparations were already on when I began the internship; so, I was immediately swept into the spirit of the Conflict Transformation Workshops. This was my introduction to the field of *conflict transformation*.



Soumita Basu and Muna Baig at the First Conflict Transformation Workshop *Rehumanising the Other* in June 2001

Do you remember how much fun we had getting to know everyone in the group? Nonetheless, all that time we spent within the context of the Workshop was clearly more than just a group of young people coming together. I remember stepping into some of the Workshop sessions and being struck by the seriousness and the sensitivity with which the participants contributed to the programme. The Workshop was a tremendous learning experience for me, particularly in terms of the significance of such programmes in affecting the political/personal lives of young people living under the shadow of conflicts that may appear irresolvable. Unsurprisingly, I came to work with WISCOMP after completing my Master's degree.

What about you? How did you get involved with the Workshops?

Muna: I heard about the Workshop from Kausar Sheikh, a faculty member at Kinnaird College, Lahore, where I studied. Around the time the Workshop was announced, I was interested in issues of public interest litigations and human rights in Pakistan. I was discussing my ideas with Ms. Sheikh and she suggested that I apply to be part of the delegation that she was putting together for the WISCOMP Workshop.

Soumita: Any special memories from the Workshop?

Muna: Well, meeting you for starters! Seriously speaking, I think there are just too many to enumerate. More than individual memories, I think the Workshop itself served as a constructive forum and an effective ice-breaker. Seeing everyone share their long-standing, innermost notions of "the other" was an enlightening experience, and also rather emotional.

And, yes, I remember how you had promised to take me to FabIndia and managed to do so only two hours before our group was to leave for the airport. During this short period of time, we also had to attend a farewell reception organised for us at Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi. Never had I run around in a store like that! My shopping skills were put to a serious test in those 30 minutes I had in FabIndia, and I must say that never have I had a more exhilarating shopping experience!

Soumita: Yes, I remember that! And how do you feel about all those memories now?

Muna: I had enjoyed my WISCOMP experiences immensely but I had not expected to be this influenced at an academic or professional level. I had always been interested in issues of peace and conflict, and was actively involved in membership groups such as Amnesty International and Oxfam. I think the Conflict Transformation Workshop inspired me to focus more on these interests. I remember our frequent conversations on the various political developments in South Asia! I was fascinated by your academic interest in international politics and your work with WISCOMP, and the entire team's efforts to affect conflict transformation in the region at various levels.

The result was that - somewhere along the way - I realised that my real calling was in the humanitarian sector. My exposure to human rights law at the London School of Economics & Political Science and to international humanitarian law at the University of Oxford helped consolidate my thoughts. I decided to delve deeper into these issues using a legal lens. I am currently working to qualify as a lawyer, and aim to develop a practice focusing on human rights and conflict issues. I do believe that my WISCOMP experiences were instrumental in helping me go beyond the typical veneer of altruism and discover within me a lifelong commitment to conflict transformation.

Soumita, you are writing your Ph. D on international security. I am sure working with WISCOMP had something to do with it!

Soumita: Oh yes, absolutely! My research on gender and security emerged out of my work with WISCOMP. Further, when I am faced with any cynicism about my current research, thinking about the WISCOMP projects that I was part of - primarily *Athwaas*,

its Kashmir initiative, and the Conflict Transformation Workshops - help me keep the faith! These experiences give me the confidence that research into issues of conflict and peace can make a difference to our lives as well as to the institutions around us. It may be a rough road but surely one that is worth changing the course for! And on this road, the collective soul of our Conflict Transformation Workshop community is valuable.

...We could have kept talking as we often do over the phone. This is an ongoing conversation. We feel that the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshops are valuable in providing a platform to many such conversations that would either not have happened otherwise or else remained separate from the broader political communication in the subcontinent. Our friendship has been one of the many personal bonds that emerged from the WISCOMP experience. We are aware of the important professional partnerships that also have their roots in the Workshop. As founding members of the Conflict Transformation Workshop process in 2001, we are proud to be a part of this network of friends and colleagues that will surely affect the South Asian region.

~

Muna Baig is based in London, UK, where she is currently in the process of qualifying as a solicitor.



Soumita Basu is a Doctoral Scholar at the Department of International Politics, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, UK.



BRINGING PEOPLE CLOSER

IMRAN BASHIR AWAN & AHMED IJAZ MALIK



As our flight prepared to land in New Delhi in September 2004, we were remembering Richard Nixon's words about the subcontinent. "Nuclear powers have never fought each other; but the clash between Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India over the disputed Kashmir territory could erupt into the world's first war between nuclear powers."

Dialogue, instead of war

With the gradual realisation that there could be no long-lasting peace or military solution to India-Pakistan conflicts, both countries seemed compelled to initiate a series of *Composite Dialogues* in 2004. Initially, the process focused on eight segments. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) were the locus of the discussions. Considering the fact that this process required, above all, changing existing stereotypes and seeing the enemies of the past as partners (at least, if not as friends) in the walk towards peace and stability, negotiation and implementation of CBMs were certainly uphill tasks.

The process was further compounded by the fact that initiatives towards peace were often subject to domestic politics and international political tensions, both of which have the negative potential to forestall the progress of détente and conflict resolution. The success of such dialogues depends on the foresight of national leaders who recognise the benefits of CBMs and work vigorously to pursue them, despite criticism or risk.

The history of relations between India and Pakistan reveals that prospects for the success of CBMs are limited. This pessimistic conclusion is based on facts; on a number of occasions, India and Pakistan have negotiated agreements, but failed to honour them. Agreed that the track record of CBMs has not been very impressive, but this does not mean that they have failed to contribute towards the desired amelioration of the prevalent atmosphere. The experience of nuclear-related CBMs between New Delhi and Islamabad is encouraging.

The balance of terror between India and Pakistan due to their nuclear status has been forcing them to address their bilateral problems rationally. Using dialogue, instead of war.

Finally, there is a need to acknowledge that CBMs are not devices to resolve conflict; they merely facilitate the peace process, an important one that needs to be promoted in the context of India and Pakistan.

Realists & idealists

In the light of *conflict transformation*, the entire process can be understood theoretically by viewing conflict through the perceptual lens of the basic unit of analysis. In the traditional state-centric view, the basic unit of analysis is the *State* and its survival is *the* ultimate objective. The realist perspective appears to be the basic explanation when studying war and conflict. The realist approach tries to fathom the causes of conflict through the lens of power politics in order to ensure that the

causes identified are addressed and peace established. Apparently, the realist perspective cannot pay dividends as the unabated pursuit of military power only implies that the survival of state requires the acquisition of power. And that peace can be maintained only by surpassing the adversary state in military power.

On the contrary, the idealist approach seems to study conflict taking *human beings*

to be the basic unit and implying that human nature – that may apparently seem to be power-oriented – can yet be reformed. This approach is closer to the theme of *conflict transformation* in its hope that all human beings share a bond of humanity, stronger than their individual aspirations for success and the acquisition of power, stronger than their identification with some specific creed or race. With this growing realisation, the world – in the view of idealist and cosmopolitan philosophers of modern times – is transforming into a universal society, wherein the individual human being and his behaviour study of conflict.



Imran Bashir Awan & Ahmed Ijaz Malik enjoy a meal during a WISCOMP recreational trip to Chowki Dhani, Jaipur

New ideas and goals

WISCOMP started the Annual Conflict Transformation Workshops in 2001. Three years later, in 2004, we were invited as participants. The Workshop brought together 30-35 young people – mostly students – from India and Pakistan. It is here, in this ten-day Workshop, that we learnt about *conflict transformation* and *peace building*.

However, the most important feat that the Conflict Transformation Workshop accomplished was bringing people of the two countries closer. When the Workshop started, all of us had rigid views. By the time it ended, our views had changed. By sharing views, undertaking combined study for projects and presentations and spending time together, we realised how alike our thoughts were. We realised that this generation has new ideas and goals and will not be stuck with old rivalries.

Deepening knowledge of each other

People-to-people contact is the *only* solution for conflict and is *the* way to peace.

People from both countries have no issues with each other; it is the governments on both sides that have issues. People-to-people contact is extremely important in improving relations between the hostile neighbours. It would assist in building trust and overcoming mutual fear, both in India and Pakistan.

The best ways to embark on the road to changing feelings is to complement politically self-enlightened actions with deepening knowledge of each other. We *have* to pursue and sustain dialogue at the levels of governments, think-tanks and non-governmental institutions so that the deep-rooted mistrust and suspicion that India and Pakistan still harbour on various issues are altered. This process becomes more authentic and attractive when better implementation of existing CBMs are ensured and new ones negotiated. Thus, exchanges of tourists, sportspersons, poets, artists, intellectuals, scholars and professionals would *definitely* have a positive impact on peace endeavours.

The road ahead

The emerging geo-political and geo-economic environments have compelled both India and Pakistan to normalise their relations by resolving outstanding issues peacefully through dialogue. The relations between the two countries have definitely improved.

This, despite what critics of the peace process say: that the peace process has run aground; that no progress has been made on any of the real issues since the commencement of the composite dialogue in January 2004; that it is about time the governments realised that no progress is likely to come out of these visits and rounds of talks, as the record of the last three years suggests.

Presently, the two countries are guardedly optimistic about the prospect of resolving their differences. There are big opportunities for both countries to boost regional economic cooperation. The friendship between India and Pakistan guarantees benefits not only for the two countries, but for the entire region, including South and Central Asia.

Our solution for conflict and way to peace remains people-to-people contact.

~

Imran Bashir Awan is a Political and Security Analyst based in Islamabad, Pakistan. Currently, he is the Managing Trustee of the Karam Bakhsh Awan Trust.



Ahmed Ijaz Malik is a Lecturer at the Department of International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Currently, he is Doctoral Scholar at the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of London, UK.



LESSONS IN BUILDING BRIDGES

NADIA ANJUM



My God! Will I survive?

Do I dare break through the imposing reality or tectonic plates of politics?

This was, I confess, the scenario that engaged my sensibilities prior to WISCOMP's Annual Transformation Workshop. A volley of definite *nos* and *obs* echoed through it.

The confidence barometer displayed a *high alert!*

The readings....

Confidence levels: LOW

Mutual trust: LOW

Suspicion: HIGH

Collaborations: LOW

Team spirit: LOW

Loyalty & commitment: HIGHLY POLITICISED AND MANIPULATED

Sense of purpose: DEFUSED. NONE.

People-friendly incentives: DISCOURAGING

Student mobilisation: BELOW AVERAGE

Cultural Exchange: BARELY

Sensitive subjects: SIACHEN, NUCLEARISATION, PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONTACT, KASHMIR

Then, I reconsidered. Why not? Where is the harm in exploring and re-evaluating the existing framework?

Or in identifying socio-economic pitfalls and our mutually-shared strengths and weaknesses?

The policy summary of WISCOMP too struck a chord: women as individuals committed to the cause of conflict resolution and peace. I saw a tiny ray of hope, an intangible presence of a collective consciousness. I held onto it.

One

"Do not judge your days by what you have achieved today, but by what you have sown today." This quotation on a wall at Delhi's airport gave me a wonderful insight into the Indian psyche as a nation. It reflected a positive, futuristic stance. This was *Lesson Number 1*.

Two

In Delhi, the world outside seemed all too familiar, be it the climate, the traffic or the road management; be it the population explosion or the economic disparity. This was *Lesson Number 2*. Could people across the borders not

collaborate to create a resource pool of scientists and civil engineers? The question loomed large.

Three

Presentations and open discussions, questions and answers, simulations and sightseeing excursions, welcomes and farewells. All these WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop experiences opened up new avenues. *Conflict, peace* and *resolution* no longer seemed to be givens. Rather they were notions to be critiqued and re-evaluated through one's personal consciousness. *Lesson Number Three* learnt.

Four

Lesson Number Four: The media needs to transform its role. Existing structures of attitudes and references need to be critically re-evaluated.

Five

I felt empowered as an individual. "Peace comes from the ability to cope with conflicts." These words of resource person Udayakumar carried weight. Successful and effective discourse depended, I concluded, upon knowing what the other side wants to communicate. This was *Lesson Number Five*.

Multiplying lessons

Though tightly scheduled, the Workshop sessions were thematically well-structured. The fraternity gelled well with each other. Lessons multiplied. Why should women be denied the right to author a positive change, I pondered. Could they not deduce and advocate a healthy approach towards conflict resolution?

I assessed the Workshop's implications for future peacebuilding processes. Now, the role of the individual seemed important. As a representative of the Kinnaird spirit, I solemnly declare here my commitment to the cause of intercultural communication and peacebuilding.

~

Nadia Anjum is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, Pakistan.





FIRST STEPS & GIANT LEAPS

ANISHA KINRA & SEEMA SRIDHAR

"If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is – infinite."

– William Blake (1757-1827)
English engraver, illustrator & poet

The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. As we walked down the hallway to attend the first session of the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop, we knew we had taken *that first step* in our quest to discover peace.

Problematising peace

We started the first session with a simple question: *What is peace?* What came forth was the idea that peace was beyond definitions. Was something amorphous that could, perhaps, only be perceived by each through her own distinctive lens.

Each expression of peace at that session was different; yet, they struck the same chord. Like different notes blending to create harmony. It was with this gentle knock on the doors of perception that we began our journey to the *other* side.

With little steps, we tread the beautiful and adventurous path of discovery towards that common underlying chord which bound all our definitions of peace. That which gave our definitions the strength of the collective and the space of the individual.

Our pursuit for peace began by *problematising* the very notion of it. Was peace the mere absence of violence between two countries? Or did it mean something else, something more? What motivates groups of people to mutilate and slaughter one another? Why are more and more people – and not just in our two countries – taking to violence to make their voices heard? These critical questions of contemporary times marked the start of the journey we began.

Understanding peace and turmoil at the individual level and relating to one another at the human level were instrumental in our larger quest to understand conflict and envision a future bereft of it. The medium of the Conflict Transformation Workshops were aptly suited for this endeavour. We began to comprehend the complexities of our individual pursuits for peace.

We realised that we often forget the fact that nations are a collection of individuals. To create a lasting impact on the behaviour of nation-states, we have to first go through transformative experiences as individuals. These individual journeys would then reflect at a higher level in the behaviour of the collective.

Learning & unlearning

For us, "the other" did not just mean those from across the border or from a conflict-ridden state. "The other" was more of the all-encompassing sort, including every individual present at the Workshop: a few closer to home, a few with whom we had a lot in common and a few we had no idea what to expect from.

Each passing day had something new to offer. And this was not limited to the academic sessions alone. In fact, much learning and unlearning happened outside the Workshop classroom. When we entered the Workshop session every morning, the socialising from the previous evening would have prepared us for the day's re-learning!

The semantics of difference

A part of that re-learning was exploring and discovering interfaces between the personal, the spiritual and the political. It was impossible to keep our personal experiences, our growing friendships and deepening bonds outside the conference halls. Our detachment from and indifference to the violence across the border – often conveniently shielded behind the façade of political ideologies and pseudo-patriotic beliefs – was shattered. People from across the border were no more anonymous identities. They now had faces, names and a place in our hearts. As boundaries blurred, "the other" not merely seemed closer, but also similar. Difference became a matter only of semantics.

The politics of ideology is simultaneously a politics of *otherisation*, for our identity is defined *vis-à-vis* the other. But as we lived through the Workshop experience together – debating, talking, laughing, crying – all identities merged into one. Under that roof, in that shared space, we were not Indian or Pakistani; Hindu or Muslim; only peacemakers seeking a new struggle, a new challenge, a new journey.

Some memorable instances and interactions left a powerful impact upon us and helped shape our perceptions.

Sharing stories

The Workshop session on *Sustained Dialogue: A Public Peace Process* was most rejuvenating for it made us relate to one another's stories.

Participants were divided into groups in which all individuals were given a chance to narrate powerful personal experiences. This exercise enabled the simplest, most direct and remarkable means of communication! As one human being to another. Interchanging what we had learnt in our respective groups with the rest of the Workshop participants palpably broke the ice between us. As we returned to the Workshop hall after the session, the air was filled with a positive aura. With a sense of belonging and togetherness that was perceived by the organisers as well.

The spirit of Navratri

One truly transformative experience was watching the musical ballet, *Ramayan* at Delhi's Sri Ram Centre. The performance was part of the *Navratri* festivities, which had set the city abuzz with cultural programmes and colourful *Durga badis*.

The WISCOMP regulars were playing the part of perfect hostesses by helping with the interpretation of the musical ballet. A Pakistani participant seated further away from us was being told the story by a Kashmiri Muslim. The lucidity in the flow of his narrative diverted our attention from the beautiful musical on stage!

The story of Ram – which has become a gruesome war cry in recent years – had so much more to offer with its message of peace, temperance and sacrifice. What better way of learning this than from a Kashmiri whose perceptions of identity and conflict had evolved in a milieu very different from ours! We witnessed the bonds of culture surpassing the manacles of politics around us. We witnessed the values of seamliness and grace in the face of hardship. Of warriors treating enemies with dignity and respect

even in the face of defeat. All depicted in an enthralling performance on stage. There was perfect synergy between the Ramayana's on-stage story of peace and tolerance and that of the human faces among us who had surmounted great conflicts.

In each other's shoes

Barriers crumbled in the Workshop session, *Theatre as a Methodology for Dialogue and Conflict Transformation* as we literally stepped into each other's shoes. Small groups of participants exchanged personal experiences for a few minutes before moving on to form other, newer groups and repeat the exercise. At the end of the session, most of us knew a lot more about most others. And in a way that regular conversations would not have permitted us to know. Some revelations were stunning and some others very moving.

Before we could analyse, judge or attach value – something our social conditioning has trained us to do – we would have moved to the next set of people and their worlds. The exercise was all about discovering the common streak of humanity in all of us. Yes, we all wanted different things. Yet, that which we did *not* want were the same. Violence. Oppression. Injustice. Bad relationships. Being told what to do. And so on. We seemed then to be made from the same clay, only cast in different forms.

As participants narrated personal stories, others enacted them; this effectively made us live through the experience of "the other". Participating in these theatre exercises opened a world of new experiences. We shed our inhibitions, reached out to traces of ourselves in

others as also to the unknown in ourselves, blending the common shades and differing hues in one creative collage.

What was most wonderful about this experience was that we also got to know our fellow Indians, some of whom we had not made the effort to know. One had found



Participants of the Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Envisioning Futures*, 2005 where Anisha Kinra and Seema Sridhar met

peace in embracing Buddhism, another in working long hours at the office. Yet others by choosing to work with street children or writing poetry. Discovering people proved to be a fascinating journey. We had never before encountered such diversity in the pursuit of one thing universal.

Imagining futures

We finally understood what our favourite musical icon meant when he sang *Imagine*. The Conflict Transformation Workshop indeed helped us create that world in our minds. It has set us on a quest to discover peace within and without and to redefine it as a state of mind rather than the state of affairs, for it is only the former which enables the latter.

The greatest challenge in this journey will be sustaining the enthusiasm, commitment and sense of purpose

beyond the safe spaces that WISCOMP accorded us. There will be moments when we will want to walk away, let go, give up. What alone will sustain us in this journey is the vision of a future beyond violence, beyond boundaries.

~

Anisha Kinra teaches Political Science at a community college in Gainesville, Florida, USA.



Seema Sridhar is a Doctoral Scholar at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.



FINDING COMMON GROUND

JAVED AHMAD TAK



In October 2005, I had the opportunity to participate in WISCOMP's Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Envisioning Futures*. It was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life.

Prior to the Workshop, I had never met residents of Pakistan. Interacting with Pakistanis, Indians and Sri Lankans at the Workshop made me happy. I found many similarities between us. Our manner of talking, our eating habits and even our sense of dressing were similar. It is only those with self-centred interests who attempt to divide us, I thought to myself.



Javed Ahmad Tak (centre, seated) with fellow participants and WISCOMP staff at *Envisioning Futures*, the Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, 2005

A vision of peace

At the Workshop, we had discussions on the various agreements signed by the governments of India and Pakistan. The proposals put forth by the various participant groups were all in favour of peace and development. No group endorsed violence or enmity.

WISCOMP has created a platform for peace through its Annual Conflict Transformation Workshops. For me, peace is that environment where one feels completely safe without any sense of mental threat. In such an environment, energy and development would be prioritised; and, arms would not exist.

Spending nine days with the Pakistanis in New Delhi during the Workshop gave me the chance to know them well. If hundreds of such conflict transformation workshops are organised for the people of India and Pakistan, peace can be restored on a larger scale.

With such initiatives, the shops of those who sell violence for their own vested interests will shut down. It was clearly felt by the students, intellectuals and social activists present at the Workshop that political leaders and foreign policy makers throughout the world (and especially on both sides of the Line of Control) do not prioritise humanitarian concerns as much as they should. It was felt that they should try to see things from the grassroots' point of view; should understand the full consequences of violence; and, should prioritise the conditions of survivors of violence.

A world without arms

WISCOMP is working towards a peace wherein human rights are protected. The organisation's contribution to peacebuilding is significant. Such work should be complemented by the governments of India and Pakistan through the endorsement of arms control treaties. A campaign to control arms should be initiated in other South Asian countries as well. The cause of peace requires the thrust of an anti-arms drive. Arms, large or small, lead to the same end: destruction of humanity, bloodshed, death and misery. They always end with tears from the eyes of the innocent, mainly women and children.

A space for women

I learnt a great deal from the Workshop which is working towards the preservation of human dignity and the empowerment of women in the peacebuilding process. Women are often sidelined and ignored in peacebuilding; they are not given the chance to come forward and take decisions. One of the ideas informing the Workshop process is that women have a role to play in creating peace.

The WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop which brought together Indians and Pakistanis is a path towards peace. On this path, I had the opportunity to meet the strangers in whose name vested interests have long been trying to divide nations.

~

Javed Ahmad Tak is a social worker with the NGO, Helpline, in Bijbehara, Jammu & Kashmir, India.





SUHANI'S SONG OF PEACE

KAMRAN REHMAT

After a tiring day, I sit down in my room and switch on the CD player. The sound is familiar. Alka Yagnik and Sonu Nigam give life to the soulful lyrics of Javed Akhtar in a song from J.P. Dutta's movie *Refugee*.

*Panchhi, nadiya, pawan ke jhonkey,
Koi sarhad na inhe roke.
Sarhadein insaanon ke liye hain.
Socho tumne aur maine
Kya paya insaan hoke.*

Birds, rivers, gusts of breeze
No border stops them.
Borders are for humans.
Just think what have you and me
achieved by being humans

The track comes back to haunt me every time I think about India and Pakistan in the context of *the border*. So much hurt, so many misgivings.

Connecting with the neighbour

The umbilical cord may have snapped, yet, nothing that hate-mongers have wrought over six decades has done anything to snap the blood ties.

We have fought wars and returned each time to the same conclusion: one cannot choose one's neighbours.

But I feel a stronger connect. Blood is thicker than water. As Akhtar suggests, the border cannot overwrite a yearning heart. Precisely why Indians and Pakistanis are overwhelmed by warmth every time they cross this divide. Why stereotyped notions of "the enemy" submerge.

I may be accused of wearing patriotism – which Samuel Johnson once termed the last refuge of the scoundrel – on my sleeve, but it is particularly true of Indians visiting Pakistan. Any number of them – be it Bollywood actor Urmila Matondkar, Saurav Ganguly, the Prince of Kolkata or the ordinary cricket fan – continue to testify to this.

Who could have, for instance, imagined that the Pakistanis would celebrate the Indian cricket team's maiden victory on their own soil in a magnificent gesture of magnanimity? Yet that is exactly what happened in Lahore in 2004. One particularly poignant Pakistani

banner inspired by Bollywood read *Pyaar Tho Hona Hi Tha* (Love was Inevitable) and stole everyone's heart. It changed the way Indians think about Pakistani people. Often, such great changes in perception result from the pure and simple actions of ordinary people.

I should know.

My father's vision of peace

My father, Rehmatullah Khan, was born in District Kangra in the snow-clad northern state of Himachal Pradesh, India. He came to Pakistan on the last train, a boy of 14 orphaned by the worst carnage in modern history. His father and many close relatives were killed in the communal frenzy that followed partition.

My father barely survived that horror. An attempt was made by a person to set him alight in a room full of haystacks. The room was then locked. Fortunately, my father managed to escape through a broken window.

Can you imagine the memories and thought-processes of a man who had seen all of this? Even so, my father was an amazing man who chose *not* to pass on the burden of acrimonious history to his children, when it would have been perfectly understandable to do just that.

My father put down the horrors of that exodus (which claimed the lives of his father and family) to a mad frenzy. It was, he explained, the worst face humanity could present in circumstances beyond its control.

In my life, I have never seen another man who was as forgiving. There is a reason for my conviction on that score.

My father rose to serve in Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was posted to New Delhi in the fall of 1987. This also marked his return to the country of his birth.

His first attempt to revisit the place was spurned because the authorities deemed it going into "enemy" territory. His last attempt was just as summarily rejected because he came from the "enemy" country!

So, what is different between India and Pakistan?

Surely, many on both sides of the divide have suffered the pangs of partition. But so long after that wanton

bloodshed, I have not heard of a graver miscarriage of justice than when a son is not allowed – either by his country of birth or the one he embraced as his own – the opportunity to visit his father's grave.

My father passed away in 1998, unsung for his remarkable vision as a man of peace. The great sense of injustice my father suffered changed my perception of life, particularly the path I choose to take with regard to India, Pakistan, the hyphenated *India-Pakistan* and what my children would learn from me.

Naming my daughter

I decided that I would take after my father, regardless of the odds. I began with a simple step. By giving my firstborn a name that originated in India but applies equally to both cultures: *Suhani* meaning *pleasant* – pleasant enough to win hearts, that is!

It was a conscious decision, premised on a tribute to all those people (wherever they may be on the planet) who have gamely – often in the face of screaming odds – struggled for peace between India and Pakistan. If charity begins at home, so does goodwill.



Kamran Rehmat's symbol of hope, Suhani

I am struck by what a gesture as small as mine can do. My little Suhani is the apple of all eyes... mostly that of Indian friends, who adore her even more. This has taught me one of the most important lessons in life: love begets love.

A case for PoWs

In the summer of 2005, when I was Assistant Editor at *The News* – Pakistan's largest circulated English language daily – we initiated a campaign to seek the release of Pakistani prisoners of war languishing in Indian jails, in some cases, for more than three decades.

I argued with my editor and the reporter doing the story that we should not confine the campaign to our prisoners alone, but that we should also raise a voice for Indian

PoWs on our side of the border. I insisted that it was only fair that the humanitarian consideration at the heart of our campaign should be extended to those Indian nationals who had similarly suffered the brutality of war and its aftermath.

Initially, my advice was ignored in the face of a strong patriotic current that came to dominate the editorial approach but I continued to push for the inclusion of Indian prisoners.

When the lopsided campaign failed to take off, I reminded my editor and the reporter that it would make sense to highlight the predicament of Indian prisoners, even if they were only concerned about their compatriots. This because the issue was likely to cause a greater storm in India and therefore, gather the momentum that was direly needed to propel the issue to the centrestage.

Finally, they relented and true to form, the issue created a commotion in India forcing New Delhi to take it up with Islamabad, which already feeling the heat of our campaign felt similarly compelled to follow suit.

As a result, the issue of prisoners' release was hurriedly put on the top of the agenda of the foreign secretary-level talks that were due at the time.

Before we knew it, the two sides had come to an agreement as a result of which more than six hundred prisoners, one third of them Indian, were freed. It remains my life's greatest satisfaction to have seen these bruised souls experience the world as free citizens again.

I cannot possibly say that it was a personal achievement since I had no power to change things, but I will bet my last rupee on the power of love as the ultimate weapon to change the equation – and sometimes, even the course of history.

The Indian prisoners will probably never know who silently prayed for them but life has been worth living for this one humble endeavour alone. It was as if happiness had seeped in through a window I did not know had been left open.

It does not take genius to make the right call on finding such a window of opportunity. All it requires is a little

article of geographical faith: what you think is good for your country should be extended to your neighbour too.

Courage & change

I am aware many will be inclined to cynically put this idea down to wishful thinking. Yet others would call it betrayal for the cause of one at whose hands my father was orphaned, then subjected to the horrors of war and finally denied the right to be at his father's grave. But then, it is easy to be cynical. To summon the courage to effect a change is far more difficult.

Whenever I look at Suhani, it reminds me that hope springs eternal in India, Pakistan and the world at large. In this, I am certain we all find a connect.

~

Kamran Rehmat is the News Editor at *Dawn News*, Pakistan's first 24-hour English television news channel, based in Islamabad, Pakistan.



AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

ARSHIA AHMED AYUB & NAJMA SANAI



Peer mediation was the programme that we had been hired to introduce and teach in schools. What we did not anticipate, however, was people mistaking "peer" for "*pir*" (Urdu for *saint*)! I wonder if our being *hijab*-wearing women added to the confusion. *That* was hiccup Number One.

Many others followed.

Expectations, expectations

It was our first workshop for teachers, whom we trained so that they could, in turn, guide children to become peer mediators at school.

We started as we always do: by gathering participants' expectations. The very first one threw us aback for a few minutes. The participant said she expected "higher energy levels"! We thought to ourselves, "Does she think this is an aerobics class?" This marked the beginning of what later evolved into a wonderful and exciting journey.

A voice of its own

After the initial glitches, we learnt that the western/North American model of peer mediation, though good, did not entirely address *our* system, culture, values and needs.

Consequently, our team at The Henry Martyn Institute, International Centre for Research, Interfaith Relations and Reconciliation (Hyderabad, India) started to re-work the workshop to fit our requirements more closely. Seven years have passed since and the programme has now begun to speak for itself.

Teaching peace

Although the noted French author Victor Hugo was not referring to a *Culture of Peace* when he wrote of the power of "an idea whose time has come", he could well have meant just that. The notion of a *culture of peace* revolves around creating a peaceful school environment wherein children from different social strata, varied cultures and diverse faiths coexist in harmony.

By working with schools on the Culture of Peace Programme, we – hopefully – equip teachers (and through them, children) with the knowledge and skills required to create healthy, respectful and integrated surroundings. Schools will always be microcosms of the larger society. So, when we address the concerns and shortcomings of society at its most basic level (that of children), we bring about a change in the future.

Our Culture of Peace Programme deals with issues vital to our peaceful coexistence, namely, understanding stereotypes and prejudices, respecting others' beliefs and values and tolerating differing perspectives. Practical teaching tools that enhance the efficacy of teachers are demonstrated. The programme is designed to incorporate elements of creativity, both in students and in teachers.

Techniques of cooperative discipline are illustrated through models that advocate nonviolent means of maintaining discipline and peace. Effective communication skills are outlined to enable the building of bridges of understanding, both inside and outside the classroom. Most importantly, peace education is integrated into the regular curriculum of the school. Through this system, teachers can include and "teach"

ideas of peace even as they are teaching English, Maths, Science or Social Studies.

Challenges

It has been a labourious process getting schools to understand the concept and benefits of the culture of peace and spare two of their precious teaching days for the workshop. Then, there are the challenges of training and actual implementation in the classroom.



Arshia Ayub (extreme left) and Najma Sanai (right) with Pakistani participants Fawad Malik and Tariq Jawaid Alam at a panel discussion at *Transcending Conflict*, the Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, 2003

It is rather easy to get frustrated and lose heart. Many a time, we have entered a school for an initial meeting to "sell" the idea to the principal or administrator-in-charge only to be met by an unyielding receptionist. Someone whose only sense of power in life comes from making one wait endlessly without even allowing a moment of eye contact!

Victories

However, the optimism that we (and, luckily, others at our Institute) are made us persevere and we are now blessed to see the benefits of the programme in schools that have successfully implemented it, including the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Princess Esin Girls' School and the Glendale Academy in Hyderabad, India.

Beginning with children

We envision a future wherein we would have impacted children enough to bring about a paradigm shift.

To achieve this, we need to reach out to more and more schools, first in the state of Andhra Pradesh and later across the whole country.

Recently, we met the dynamic director of an educational television channel who is interested in live and interactive broadcasting of the Culture of Peace Workshops in a way that would enable us to demonstrate first-hand how, why and when the programme can work in the classroom with students. There are so many ideas germinating now. The vitality and dynamism of the

programme will, we are sure, keep it going from success to greater success.

As Mahatma Gandhi once wrote, "If we are to teach real peace in the world, we have to begin with the children."

This quote, with which our Concept Paper begins, is a beautiful illustration of the foundation on which the Culture of Peace Programme stands.

~

Arshia Ahmed Ayub works as Associate Facilitator at the Henry Martyn Institute, International Centre for Research, Interfaith Relations and Reconciliation, Hyderabad, India.



Najma Sanai works as Associate Facilitator with the Conflict Resolution Programme at the Henry Martyn Institute, Hyderabad, India.





OF GEOGRAPHIES

STORIES OF HOME & BEYOND IN SOUTH ASIA

Collected here are stories of the places we come from and those we have been to.

The personal narratives from Bangladesh and Nepal in this section reflect the hopes and fears of its people for the future of their countries. Three Kashmiri voices tell us stories of struggle, separation and redemption from a beautiful land torn apart by conflict. Then there are the tales of memorable first visits to "the other side".

More voyages into the heart of India and Pakistan follow.

From these journeys emerge a reassuring sense of shared spaces. And,
"of a sense of belonging to something beyond home,"
as alumna Smriti Vij acknowledges in her story *Homeward Bound*.

THE BIRTH OF HOPE

ZAKIA HAQUE



The state of affairs in Bangladesh on March 26, 2007, following 36 years of independence, made me think about my country in a rather different way. We were in a state of Emergency. All political activities were banned for the present. The caretaker government initiated a series of reforms to free the nation from political corruption. The army that fought the liberation war of 1971 was in total control of the state with the objective of ensuring a safe environment for all citizens.

We, in Bangladesh, had begun our quest for peace.

A time for questions

As a citizen of Bangladesh, I have *always* felt proud to be born here. I often attempt to analyse the country's resources and its citizens' potential. We, in Bangladesh, have numerous resources that need proper mobilisation by state and citizens.

Although the liberation war of 1971 was fought to uphold democratic values, Bangladesh has, perhaps, never really enjoyed democracy in the real sense. This is mainly because our country has largely been controlled by a handful of people closely associated with elite political families. We have lost our real leaders and the personality-centric (rather than ideology-based) politics that followed has enabled political parties in power to misuse their authority.

Consequently, the bureaucracy and the judiciary, the two public institutions that make up the very fabric of the governance of a country, have been gradually forced to compromise their integrity and become subservient to the whims of those in power.

At this important time in our history, I – like all other common people – cried for peace. But did we achieve it? Did I feel a peaceful environment around me? I pose

these questions to myself, *not* others. What will happen to the nation? How long will we live at the mercy of our political leaders?

A time of crisis

At the end of 2006, the last democratically elected government of Bangladesh handed over power to a caretaker government. The debate as to who will be the chief of the caretaker government became a major issue. The eyes of the entire nation were on them.

I was expecting my first child then. Around me, people were eagerly waiting for the election process to commence. However, unfortunately, it collapsed. *Hartals* and blockades commenced.

It became hard even to go to the office. The situation was unpredictable and there was practically no government in the country. Those like me who had not seen the war of independence – the greatest crisis in the history of Bangladesh – found it very difficult to comprehend the realities outside. Television news showed people dying on the streets in what appeared to be a political backlash.

At that time, I was living with my parents. My father was very ill and the doctors could not diagnose his ailment.

A time to celebrate

On September 2, 2006, my first child was born. My family, including my parents, sisters and husband, became busy looking after her. On looking at the face of my little daughter, I forgot the whole world outside me! She was a world of peace right in front of me!

Around this time, the country woke to the news of Dr. Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank jointly receiving

the Nobel Peace Prize for 2006 for efforts towards achieving peace through economic solvency for common people. In a special address to the nation, Dr. Yunus requested the head of the caretaker government as well as the President to listen to all and do what is good for all. To do what is best for the country in the long term.



Zakia Haque (centre) and fellow participants from Bangladesh perform a Bangla song at the farewell dinner of the Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, 2003

THE BIRTH OF HOPE

Along with my father, I watched Dr. Yunus on television. His words came as psychological encouragement to all of us.

Soon after, more hope came in the form of Dr. Yunus' new political party with citizens' membership, *Nagorik Shakti* (People's Power). We became optimistic about the possibilities for an alternative political future for Bangladesh.

A time of uncertainties

Around the same time, I recall that a direct confrontation occurred between two political parties. The President appeared helpless as members of the first caretaker government resigned one after another. The political games played by the country's last government and the rival demands made by the opposition party had made the entire scenario more complicated, more unhealthy.

As ordinary citizens of the country, we felt completely insecure. No one could predict the course of events. We felt lost. It appeared to be a war-like situation in our independent country. Some of us thought that a civil war-like situation might arise.

Following the birth of my daughter, I re-joined work on December 3, 2006, but many of our activities became uncertain owing to the crisis in the country.

On the January 11, 2007, the President formed a new caretaker government all of a sudden and the army took power. The entire scenario changed drastically. Since my student days, it was with my father that I usually shared political views. As I was staying with my parents following the birth of my daughter, the opportunity to do so presented itself again, although my father was very sick at this time.

On January 24, 2007, I sat talking with my father as he took his dinner. He was feeling rather weak with asthma and told me that the state of emergency should continue for some more time in order to establish peace in the country.

Alas! My father died the next day and moved on to a different world. And we were left behind searching for an illusory peace.

A time for change

The present caretaker government, silently backed by the military, has been jailing thousands of corrupt political leaders including the most powerful ones once thought to be untouchable. I believe that this action will have a powerful impact on the upcoming elections, whose date remains uncertain. It is extremely heartening to see that the caretaker government is restructuring the bureaucracy and taking positive initiatives for political reform. I am more hopeful now than ever before about the possibility of a peaceful country for my child. She will be a part of the long journey towards peace when power will be back with the people. A truly democratic Bangladesh will then emerge, we hope.

~

Zakia Haque is presently Communication Facilitator for the GCAP-South Asia Regional Secretariat of the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) in Dhaka, Bangladesh.



FINDING EMANCIPATION IN THE HEART OF THE ENEMY



AMBREEN SEHR NOON

*I am subsumed by the trappings of my name and identity.
Journeys. On aeroplanes. On trains. On buses.
To nations. To people. Between people.*

Subsumed

Even in an age of globalised media, of borderless countries, of MTV identities, I still remained within the confines of my borders, my religion, my ethnicity, my name. Such is the dichotomy of my age – where, on the one hand, I relate to things that were previously not mine to own up to and, on the other, I forget what I was once a part of.

Life, it is said, is a series of journeys. Often, the most revealing are those that bring us closer to ourselves. It is so much easier to look at the world through a myopic lens, where everything is differentiated and divided according to personal views of black and white. Often, with no room for grey. Yet, the truth is that we live in grey.

*(H)industan. (I)ndia. (J)ammu.
(K)ashmir.....(P)akistan.*

"Vande Mataram"

*A R Rehman sings a song which genuinely stirs one's blood.
Rani Mukerjee hums, "Om Jai Jagdeesh Hare".
But you cannot sing either. It's not patriotic.*

Two errant children, misbehaved and unruly, governed by a reckless, indifferent nanny who took her dues and left. They could not get up and move, so where they sat, they erected tall walls. Every now and then, one would pinch the other and squabbling would ensue. With no one to guide either in true sincerity, the walls grew taller, thicker, meaner. They both played bully and other kids around the playground had to choose sides. Some lost out, some won. And as time passed, neither was willing to trust the other.

They told us it was politics and that we would not understand.

And so, we both assumed the worst. It was easier that way. One did not have to think too much to address the reasons behind the rape of mothers and sisters, the killing of children, the indoctrination of young boys, the dislocation of lives, the eradication of memories and

homes. It was the 9 pm news and there was *one* person to blame. That smug little Indian across the border. My life is miserable because I have to starve without food, go unemployed and live uneducated; all so that this meagre roof above my head can be called Pakistan. Because my grandfather and his grandfather before him said it was for Pakistan *mera des*. I will hate that Indian because it gives me something to do. And so, life was relatively simple.

And then, I took a plane to "the other side". First, disappointment set in. This place was no different. The same trees lined the canals. Here too, the fans rumbled slowly on long summer afternoons. Here too, mosquitoes caused malaria. The birds still flew south for the winter. The very same beggars lined the streets. The cars here spurted carbon dioxide too. Even the people looked like me!



Ambreen Noon (left, seated on the floor) with Indian alumni of Kinnaird College, Lahore

I walked down its streets where women spoke the same language of motherhood, of distress, of hope, of chains, of dreams. The poverty that struck my people caused the same reaction here. And the girl who was most enjoyable company was the Sikh who told the best racist jokes! I like racist jokes but cannot tell that one about the *pathan*. A *pathan* is a Pakistani.

My picture had flaws.

But I still clung to "my" identity. It was easier returning to the shell. Even within the flag of our fathers, we had groups and divisions. But when we went to the table to talk, we put on a united national front. If they could

quote numbers, we had double the figures. If their story brought a tear to your eye, we surely could come up with one that made you howl. If they had Kargil, we suffered at Siachin. Tit for Tat. Again and again and again.

Freed

Then somewhere along the way, I fell in love. Maybe with myself. Maybe with the idea of living. Maybe with India, and with it, with Pakistan.

For the first time, I looked at myself from the eyes of another. Another who was familiar, yet estranged. I experienced welcoming hospitality, open warmth and a shared history that for once in my life went beyond 40-50 years. India owned me up and despite my resistance, I warmed to her and her people.

I found my freedom in India. I got on a rickshaw for the first time in my life and thought outside and beyond the dimensions of my superimposed morals and education. It was strange finding emancipation in the heart of the enemy. Maybe it was just luck. Maybe my trip came at an opportune time. Maybe I had to face the demon of "the other" before I could face up to those in me. Maybe a lot of maybes.

They say you learn to forgive family, for without them you are no one. You have no identity. No matter how big the wound, no matter how deep the mistrust, when

one embraces the other with an acceptance of the past and a promise for the future, we can move on. That opportunity came in India.

One is not as guarded as before. Not as distrustful. If I stumble and accept my fall, I give the other the chance to fall with me, and if possible pick me up as well. Thereafter, we both walk hand in hand.

Such are the friendships from across the border. Not only do they mitigate the line that divides us but they also make us more accepting of each other's faults within our own mental and physical boundaries. There is no "I" now. Just an "Us". Both Pakistan *and* India. There is hope in this fraternity and this holds strong in the face of the uncertainties of the future.

~

Ambreen Sehr Noon is a Writer and Staff Reporter with the *Gulf News* in Dubai, UAE.



This collaborative storytelling project, *Closer to Ourselves*, derives its title from Ambreen's words in the narrative above: "Life, it is said, is a series of journeys. Often, the most revealing are those that bring us closer to ourselves."

22 HOURS TO NEW DELHI

SALMA MALIK



I have been to India thrice: twice to Delhi and once to Goa. The first visit was, however, the most memorable.

Not an alien country

The reason that brought me to India in the sweltering heat of May-June 2003 was WISCOMP's Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Transcending Conflict*. When I received the invitation letter, there were – to be honest – no splendid thoughts of being an ambassador of peace between these two very angry neighbours. Instead, I was very excited to be getting an opportunity to travel to India and see the place for myself.

For me, India was not an alien country. One of my uncles, by virtue of being a member of the diplomatic corps, had served there. As children growing up in the 1980s, sending shopping lists for *saris* and clothes from India was a rather regular feature. The Asian Games of 1982 with its cute mascot, Appu, is another significant milestone in my memory bank. Of course, the legendary tales of gracious hospitality and warmth showered on Pakistanis and Indians, whenever they would visit the other's country, were all part of my "image" of India. After securing – at the last minute – all the relevant government documents required to travel to India, I started on my journey, which should not have taken more than three or four hours from Pakistan.

To Delhi via Dubai

The flights for Delhi and Mumbai leave from Lahore and Karachi respectively. Those travelling from Islamabad have to first reach Lahore. From there, it is a maximum of one hour's air travel.

However, with the military standoff between the two countries in 2003 and the dreadful ban on overflights, the shortest and most widely travelled route was via Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Consequently, I reached Delhi with a severe jet lag after 22 long hours of travel!

I write of this experience to particularly stress two points. One, that conflict has a severely negative impact on a nation. The decision to restrict air and land linkages was a cause of great discomfort to many people in the two countries. Despite these restrictions, however, people were travelling back and forth. I encountered government officials, development workers, members of

civil society and peace activists who were trying to transcend the atmosphere of conflict and transform it into something more viable.

A taste of India

As such, the military standoff and the tension of high politics made the average Indian a little uncomfortable about my being a Pakistani. Yet, nothing could stand in the way of my seeking fun at any given opportunity. Although I religiously made a trip to Agra to see the Taj Mahal – in the forty-degree temperature and with no romantic companion other than a very energetic and talkative driver-guide – its beauty was somewhat lost to my less than romantic self. What totally mesmerised me, however, was the Qutub Minar in Delhi with a uniquely beautiful architecture of its own.



Salma Malik (right) enjoys a dance with Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Honorary Director, WISCOMP (centre) and Nausheen Wasi, Lecturer, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi at the Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, 2003

The learning

The WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop I attended was a gathering of young practitioners from the field of conflict and peace studies. What impressed me was the commitment of this select gathering of young South Asian men and women to the various causes they had devoted themselves to. Whether it was communal harmony in Gujarat, rehabilitation of Tamil women in Sri Lanka or highlighting the plight of "widow villages" in Kashmir, young women as well as men were doing more than their share of sensitisation and rehabilitation work.

Being a teacher myself, I went with a mindset that I would know a lot about what would be taught at the

Workshop. Much to my surprise, however, *conflict transformation* proved to be a very different approach from what I knew.

Besides the learning, I will always cherish the memories of happy moments shared with my Indian room mates and friends, Malini Sur, Kavita Suri and Pradeep Dutta, and, of course, the ever-helpful and smiling WISCOMP team.

Back home with cherished memories of the Delhi trip, I was very happy to receive a positive feedback from my students when I included components of *conflict transformation* in my study package. This, I consider, my humble contribution to this wonderful initiative.

Returning to Delhi

When I came back to Delhi three years later in October 2006 for WISCOMP's Fifth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, *Collaborative Explorations*, it was with a sense of victory and achievement. Most of the official hurdles had been ironed out. There was no diversion to Dubai. Instead, I took a direct flight from

Lahore to Delhi. This time round people were travelling back and forth through road, rail and air links. Groups of school children were visiting each other's country.

The message of WISCOMP had spread and many more people were becoming a part of this growing family from across the border. The topics included in the Workshop and the level of discussion signified just how far WISCOMP and its Workshop alumni had travelled in their quest for peace. This makes me confident that the process thus started will certainly prove irreversible.

~

Salma Malik is a Lecturer at the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.



FROM DELHI TO DARFUR: A JOURNEY IN MINDFULNESS



EVELYN THORNTON

Travelling through Darfur, Sudan in the summer of 2006, I interviewed angry Sheiks on desert hillsides, women lugging food aid to their shelters in camps for the displaced, gun-toting young men in rebel militias, diplomats negotiating for peace, and the struggling soldiers of the African Union peacekeeping mission.

Although my primary purpose was to assess the impact of the Darfur Peace Agreement on the ongoing conflict, my trip encompassed more than work: it was a personal struggle to understand a set of complex ethical questions about international intervention, social responsibility and peacebuilding. It was another step in a journey – a journey that I began as a 22-year-old college graduate, stepping off a plane in India for the first time.

During my time in Delhi working for the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of H.H. The Dalai Lama and its project, Women In Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP), my abstract, intangible understanding of conflict expanded immeasurably. From managing alone as a young, single American woman in the complexity of India and living with a Kashmiri and visiting her conflict-ridden state to assisting with two inspiring WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshops and crossing the Wagah border into Pakistan, the notion of conflict took on a kaleidoscope of meanings, as did the possibilities for transforming it.

Inhale

Feeling the slap delivered on the servant girl's cheek by the wealthy Auntie who ran my guest house; the leer of the mango vender's eyes on my body; the surge of people angrily railing against the government for demolishing a slum that was their home; the weakness of my lungs amid thick, pungent smog – I hardened. Travelling the mere five kilometers to work everyday was an education in the effects of systemic conflict on the lives of individuals. Vast income disparities, resource degradation, Western influence, government corruption, and population pressures competed with each other to make life difficult at every turn.

To adjust to this new reality, I began practicing yoga every morning before work. Some days, the quiet sanctuary of the ashram provided such a respite from the hot, angry frenzy on the streets that hot tears would well in my eyes as I folded my forehead to my knees in the *child's pose*.

Through my yoga practice, as well as my days shared with those striving to implement His Holiness' vision at the Foundation, I slowly realised that *conflict transformation* begins with the self. I found peace in my director's grace and poise in moments of stress, in my colleague's indomitable smile and ability to find a kind word, and in my own calm reaction to the rickshaw driver taking advantage of my foreign naiveté. I discovered that my greatest power to positively transform conflict in the world ultimately rested in the ability to create peace from within.

Exhale

Over dinners of *dhal*, *naan* and mango, my passionate and fiercely independent flat mate, Shabeen, taught me how armed conflict strips to the bone and shreds the fiber of a community. In the year we shared, her stories contrasted the joyous nostalgia of trekking in the mountains with her family as a child with the horrors of losing relatives, friends and neighbours to the violence that overtook the Kashmir Valley in the 1980s and 1990s.



Evelyn Thornton (third from left) with CT Workshop participants Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Sanam Noor, and Syed Zubair

Shabeen's many stories were echoed by *Athwaas* (Kashmiri for *extending a hand*), a group of diverse women she was a part of. Facilitated by WISCOMP, these women of all ages, beliefs and backgrounds came together with just one hope in common: the determination to end the violence destroying their lives and communities. Sitting on the edge of their circle during workshops, I listened to the anguish of a young Muslim girl who witnessed her father bound and executed for speaking out against communalism and violence; the isolation of a Hindu woman who fled her home in the cover of night for a refugee camp; the anger of another

who had lost her brother to militancy and her job to economic devastation. For each story of loss, violation and misery told by these women, thousands more remain shrouded in silence. Seeing firsthand how Shabeen and the members of *Athwaas* bridged their differences, I discovered that *listening* is indispensable to forging peace.

Step forward

Few life experiences have inspired me as deeply as the Conflict Transformation Workshops I helped organise for WISCOMP. As an American, I was inescapably an outsider, but being thus, I was uniquely observer and participant. Walking across the infamous Wagah border between India and Pakistan, passing through immense barbed wire fences, a kilometre-wide no-man zone and six passport checks, I had already observed the physical hostility separating these two nations. In our workshops, however, the animosity and suspicion that may have once divided the participants – people otherwise conditioned to hate one another – visibly melted away.

We offered participants theoretical tools for transforming conflict in Workshop sessions on conflict analysis, diplomacy, and reconciliation. But really, it was while singing Punjabi folk songs (about happy times, pre-partition) en route to the Taj Mahal in Agra, while walking through Delhi's awe-inspiring Jama Masjid together, and sharing mounds of *kebab* at Karim's that stereotypes of the Pakistani "terrorist" and Indian "aggressor" faded. Participants, me included, developed life-long bonds with one another and made commitments to improving relations between our countries.

From these Workshops, I gained a strong sense of the possible - that even the most intractable conflicts can be transformed positively. With strong leadership and a desire for change, people can (and do) come together from different sides of a conflict, engage in honest dialogue and move to a new space of trust and shared understanding. From my position "in between", I saw a need for interpreters – diplomats, people who can move between various spheres and realities (cultural, geographic, class) to enable broader, more accepting and nuanced understandings of each other and our world.

Step back

I left India determined to apply my newfound grasp of conflict and its transformation in subsequent work.

Now, as I advocate for increasing the participation of all stakeholders in peace processes, I do so with conviction. My experience with WISCOMP made it clear that the path toward global security lies in bringing together people from all sides of a conflict for dialogue, in providing a space to understand "the other's" life experiences and recognising our common humanity. Now living a comfortable life in Washington D.C., I am poignantly reminded of how difficult it is for my fellow Americans to relate to complex, distant crises like those in Kashmir and Darfur. It is even more difficult to know how we can help transform such conflicts or why we should even try. But I know that we must. Like it or not, we have to live in this world together. As the exploding conflict in the Middle East reminds us, the world is much smaller and more interconnected than we realise.

Fold

In April 2006, a miserable, desperate young man gunned down thirty-one students in their classrooms at my alma mater, Virginia Tech. As the news reverberated in a hurricane of negative energy around the world, I closed my eyes and took myself back to a moment during my travels in India.

Heady from breathing the wafting incense, I sat on the smooth, worn wooden floor of the monastery and gazed at the white-peaked mountains peering in the window over the Buddha's left hand. A prayer ritual had begun and several maroon-robed monks (including two no more than nine or 10 years of age) chanted in steady deep tones.

Concentrating on the rooted sense of peace and awareness I felt in that sacred place, I pondered this madman at my university, the Buddhist monks of centuries ago and the ways in which we are connected. Our awareness, our compassion and our actions do make a difference – one mindful step at a time.

Evelyn Thornton is an Advocacy and Partnership Specialist for The Initiative for Inclusive Security, a programme of Hunt Alternatives Fund, Washington D.C., USA. Evelyn has served as Programme Associate for the Foundation for Universal Responsibility for His Holiness the Dalai Lama (FUR) in New Delhi, India, where she worked closely with WISCOMP.



MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH INDIA

SAIRA YAMIN



The flight time from Lahore to Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport is a mere fifty minutes. Yet it took me a few moments to register the irony that being so near we are so far away! This realisation made me sad and reflective.

As I went through immigration procedures at Delhi, somewhat exasperated by the plethora of forms for Pakistanis arriving in India, the warmth exuded by the unpretentious official was enough to make me shrug off the paperwork as mere red tape. It was my second visit to India.

As I stepped out of the airport on my way to the India Habitat Centre on Delhi's Lodi Road, I began to reminisce.

All too familiar

Glorious Goa had beckoned me a few months ago. What a delightful setting for a conference! Many of my envious friends had remarked, "Just *how* did you get a visa for Goa? Pakistanis are not allowed there." Well, this is, perhaps, a prevailing myth.

The visit to Goa made me absolutely enamoured with India, made me ache to return. I also remember my brief layover in Mumbai en route to Goa. I had ventured out of the airport and hired an *auto*, the Pakistani equivalent of a *ricksshaw*. It was almost as if I had stopped over in Karachi! The blaring music, the beggars, the hustle and bustle, the beach, the congestion! It was all too familiar.

My friend, the *ricksshawala*

The *ricksshawala* and I bonded like long-lost friends; in spite of our candid exchange on Kashmir, which he said was after all the jewel in India's crown. I got a guided tour of the supercity and was treated to *paan*. My destinations included a *sari* shop which I explored after leaving my luggage in the safekeeping of my friend, the *ricksshawala* as he had agreed to wait for me. The *ricksshawala*, transported me right to the very doorstep of the shop, ignoring the traffic policeman's protests!

On the way to the airport, the *ricksshawala* wanted to know when I would travel back so that he could give me a souvenir of Mumbai. I was touched! Upon his insistence, I informed him about my scheduled return flight. Regrettably, however, I missed the flight.

And with it my new buddy. I never did ask his name.

Eagerness to visit India

Travelling to India is quite a feat, even when the two South Asian neighbours are undergoing an unprecedented thaw in relations. If it were not for my cherished friends and colleagues in India, this privilege could not have been mine. And, I am grateful.

For most people, however, the visa procedures on both sides are rather discouraging. From the endless queues at the respective High Commissions to the long wait for a response to the visa application (often, a denial), the list of obstacles is daunting. Yet, for most the eagerness to visit India outweighs these challenges.

Mesmerising Delhi

Delhi, like the rest of India, is mesmerising. It is a treasure chest of culture and history. It is said that you come across a monument at every turn in Delhi. This is truly how I found Delhi to be. The city has been built anew six times and this, perhaps, explains the enormity of the sprawling metropolis.



Saira Yamin (right) makes a presentation at the Third Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, *Dialogic Engagement*, 2004

While in Delhi, I visited Jawaharlal Nehru University and it was indeed inspiring! In addition to observing the academic culture at the university, my friends and I enjoyed *dal roti* accompanied by ice-cold lemonade at one of the campus *dhabas*. I was instantly reminded of the Social Huts at Islamabad's Quaid-e-Azam University where I taught. When I failed to find a cab on campus, a student offered me a convenient ride on her two-wheeler to the closest *auto* stand. I appreciate her kindness.

The spirit of community

My love affair with India has been partly nourished by WISCOMP's Conflict Transformation Workshop.

It is remarkable that WISCOMP does not shy away from addressing contentious issues in addition to advocating strategies for change. If the underlying sources of mistrust are not brought to the surface, how, indeed, could they be addressed?

At the Conflict Transformation Workshop, youth from the South Asian region deliberated upon core issues including Kashmir in an environment pregnant with emotion, and, at times, accusation. The discussions were frank and yet, there was no dearth of amicability. There were laughter and tears, the sharing of experiences, the solving of problems and even strategising. Commendably, the participants – despite their emotional discourses within the Workshop – would make plans together for the post-Workshop hours. They would go to the movies, shop or just hang out together. Given the cultural commonalities and shared interests, that they gelled was but natural.

The ambience at the Workshop facilitated meaningful communication amongst the participants and therein have emerged several regional networks. The shift in attitudes and approaches has been visible and this gives me reason to be hopeful. While such initiatives may only be the tip of the iceberg, they contribute immensely to what WISCOMP terms "rehumanising the other". The participants seemed to be cultivating life-long relationships at the Workshops. Something seemed to click among them, thus, transforming their perceptions and infusing mutual confidence to relate as friends. Perhaps, what enabled us to step away from negativity and celebrate our shared understanding of life was our honesty in expressing our disagreements openly. In this spirit of community, I wish to relate what lies in the way of more meaningful interaction that the people of our two countries deserve to benefit from.

On a fragile path

India and Pakistan have made considerable progress in the spheres of economic and cultural relations. Still, the political relationship is mired with threats and perceptions of threats.

The nuclear neighbours share a long history of war and violence. Outstanding territorial and political disputes as well as a spiralling arms race continue to be stumbling blocks to peace, development and friendship. Against this backdrop, the path we are treading upon is indeed fragile, although we often seem to be moving forward.

Unresolved issues have spawned hostilities over generations as the states remain entrenched in ambivalent political exchanges. Our historical memory is replete with grievance, trauma and mistrust. Can we find the means to shed the burdens of history and build anew a repertoire of positive engagement among various tiers of society? Should we move towards transforming the foundations of our understanding so that the costs of compromise turn into incentives for guarding the affinity?

Towards creative solutions

The challenge partly lies in creating room for justice and political dialogue in Kashmir. Justice could, perhaps, serve as the middle ground. Consider the immense untold human, material, psychological and ecological costs incurred by the Kashmiris owing to the dynamics of the India-Pakistan relationship. Costs that have restrained us from problem solving.

Could we, in Pakistan and India, facilitate a process whereby, above all, the Kashmiri voice is heard *and* supported? Can we promote a vision for peaceful coexistence in South Asia? Let us not squander away precious resources remembering our injuries and our pain. Let our energies be guided towards finding creative and innovative solutions that would serve as a model for all humankind and for posterity. The onus to begin a new chapter in history lies on us.

We are the present and we alone can make the future.

~

Saira Yamin teaches at the Department of Defence & Strategic Studies, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies in Conflict Analysis & Resolution at George Mason University, USA.



WARM WINDS FROM THE EAST

RUBINA JABBAR



"The distance between Lahore and Amritsar is only that of a few miles. Therefore, in a matter of minutes, I had crossed the border. As I stood on the Indian side, I thought to myself: *is that it?* I had just crossed the border that my parents were not allowed to when their parents were dying on the other side."

These are Sania's grief-tinged words as she recalls her first trip to India in the early 90s.

Excitement, thrill, curiosity

Sania, 32, who crossed the border into Indian Punjab by train from the western Pakistani Punjab, expresses her emotional state at the historic moment in three words: excitement, thrill, curiosity.

Raised in a family divided between India and Pakistan, Sania – who hails from Karachi – recalls her childhood when not a day passed without her mother crying for her family. "Her pain and frustration would usually target my father. If she were not married to him, she argued, she would not have had to separate from her parents and emigrate to Pakistan," she narrates.

Sania's mother – the only girl in a family of four male siblings – moved to Pakistan after her marriage. Every year, she visited her family, who lived in a small town in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh (later reorganised to form Chhattisgarh, where her hometown fell). Every single year, that is, until the two countries shut their borders to each other following the war of 1965. Following that, Sania's mother did not see her family for 16 long years. Not even when her father died. Not even when he was buried with his last wish unfulfilled, that of seeing his only daughter one last time.

Conflict transformation may be applied differently in different situations. However, in the case of India and Pakistan, it has but *one* meaning. Making people-to-people contact simpler, easier. Easing visa policies and travel restrictions. Exempting travellers from "police reporting" when visiting each other's countries.

Ordinary people have nothing to do with terrorism. Neither do terrorists have anything to do with police reporting. They certainly do not report to the police before committing acts of terror. Furthermore, open a visa office in every major city, and let visa holders be able to visit, unrestricted, as many cities as they wished in each other's countries.

A taxi ride and a miracle

Visiting Mumbai as a member of the Pakistani delegation at the World Social Forum 2004 was a treasured experience, which has inscribed many unforgettable moments on the slate of my memory.

One such memory is the interesting encounter with an Indian taxi driver who drove us from Azad Maidan to India Gate after the closing ceremony of the Mumbai Forum.

The 48-year-old taxi driver had never met a Pakistani before. Having driven his cab on the roads of Mumbai for years, he admitted that he had wondered if he would ever get the chance to see a Pakistani in person.

As we argued over the taxi fare, we joked that he ought to treat us as guests and, therefore, not overcharge. He did not believe us. Instead, he asked us which Indian state we came from. We told him again that we had come not from another state but from the other side of the border to attend the World Social Forum.

"No, you are not! I have never met a..." This was his immediate reaction. Then he exclaimed, "I have Pakistanis in my taxi! A miracle, a *chamatkaar!*" He was a little convinced that we were not lying to him.



Rubina Jabbar visited the Taj Mahal during her stay in India for the WISCOMP CT Workshop

In order to be completely assured, he further enquired, "How can I believe you are indeed Pakistanis? Do you have any proof?" We offered to show him our green passports, which we carried all the time to save our necks in case we were stopped under the suspicion of attempting to cross the border illegally. Nevertheless, he did not ask to see our travel documents. He had grown to trust our words.

The taxi driver, whose name we did not ask during that short ride, proceeded to make interesting enquiries about the country he had never visited, its people and its leaders, Musharraf and Benazir. "Do the Pakistanis like Musharraf and the army?" he enquired. He went to admit that he hated politicians because they propagated war panic and animosity. "People should not listen to them because it is the people who suffer," he pointed out. "It is enough. People are fed up. Resume the train service and let people come and go. Then, things will change," he suggested.

It seemed to us that the taxi driver voiced the views of common folks who sincerely wished to do away with the conflict and wanted good relations between the two next-door neighbours. The establishment, however, did not seem to have the same opinion.

People vs. establishment

This difference of opinion was demonstrated at the Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Envisioning Futures* in 2005 in New Delhi.

The way the Workshop participants engaged in discussions, it seemed that they would not leave the forum without resolving the conflict once and for all. When some members of the establishment joined the debates, however, it became clear that they perceived the issue differently. This led me to ponder. Did they *not* understand that lavish spending on weapons is among the major causes for rampant poverty in South Asia? Did they not realise that the money spent on arms is in reality a senseless expenditure? For, it fuelled tensions in the region, stole food away from hungry children and diverted crucial funds much needed for development.

Based on the international poverty line of \$1 a day, the World Bank estimates that 43 per cent of the world's poor live in our region. Of the world's developing regions, South Asia has the lowest adult literacy rate (55.8 per cent). Nearly half the children under the age of

five are malnourished as compared to 28 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and only seven per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Notwithstanding these dismal development indicators, India and Pakistan, the two major countries in the South Asian region, devote a substantial portion of their resources on weapons to defend oneself against the other.

India – which is believed to have the highest number of HIV cases in the world and of which less than 15 per cent have access to antiretroviral drugs – has raised its defence budget. And so has Pakistan.

Signs of thawing ice

We ought to stop this senseless military spending and concentrate instead on resolving human conflict. Conflict transformation begins with communication. Threat of war cannot overshadow peaceful negotiation. Though our past is tainted by the stain of three wars and a number of border skirmishes, the present is marked by peace forums and *dosti* (friendship) buses. Peace forums such as the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD) and Women in Security Conflict, Management and Peace (WISCOMP) train young people in peacebuilding. *Dosti* buses between Lahore and Amritsar as well as the Kashmir bus service between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar have reunited relatives who had not seen each other for decades, thus boosting hopes for peace. These are signs that the ice *is* breaking.

However, having been hostile for years, attempts to forge ties based on commonalities are hardly easy. We are in the early stages of building a strong relationship. If more and more opportunities are provided for interaction, our perceptions will certainly undergo complete transformation. The blizzards in Siachin may be brutal, but the eastern wind from the plains is warm and welcoming.

~

Rubina Jabbar is a freelance writer presently based in Chicago, USA.



A GREAT GRAND-DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY

SAIRA BANO ORAKZAI



A fair woman of a short stature smiles, then hugs me. Embraces me to her chest.

I awoke with a start and thought that I had seen my grandmother in my dream. She had died when I was very young. But why was she short and so slim? For, in reality, she was tall and healthy.

The morning after, I narrated the dream to my mother. She in turn told my eldest aunt. Later that evening, my aunt suggested that the woman in the dream was my maternal great grandmother. Perhaps, conjectured my aunt, she had wanted to say something. I did not understand the meaning of the dream then. I noted it in my diary.

Visiting my great grandmother's grave

In 2005, I was selected to attend WISCOMP's Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Envisioning Futures* at New Delhi. Before I left for Delhi, my mother gave me special instructions to visit the grave of my great grandmother who is buried there. In the excitement of visiting India, I did not quite realise the importance of this.

On the second day after reaching Delhi, I began touring Delhi with Asifa, a fellow Workshop participant. We went to the shrine of Hazrat Nizam ud Din Auliya where I requested the shrine in-charge to help me find the grave of my great grandmother. It was there that I remembered my dream and realised that I was the first one in the family to visit her grave in 58 years!

Although this may seem to be a very ordinary story, common enough among separated families on both sides of the India-Pakistan border, it struck me deeply that no one could visit her grave in 58 years as the entire family had migrated to Pakistan. The trauma of partition, I thought, was being felt even by the dead. Their souls have been missing their loved ones. My journey towards peace started that very day.

Finding inner peace

Are perceptions, territories and ideologies so strong that we forget to live like human beings? Is hatred so deep-seated that there is no room left for love and peace? Half a century of loneliness has been felt even by the dead. Accordingly, what would be the feelings of living

ones, torn away from their families and homes?

In my view, the basic reason for the prevalent attitude among the people of India and Pakistan is the absence of inner peace. One cannot achieve external peace until and unless there is peace inside the person herself. Peace lends an inner strength, a creative energy that sustains us. That enables us to construct bridges over the gaps that exist between appearances and reality. Only this variety of inner peace, I believe, will allow us to transcend and unify the seemingly-opposed principles of life, such that we do not see one another as rivals.

Peace is an experience of the unity that overcomes divisions in humanity such as the biases of religion, gender and class. Inner peace leads to tolerance, brotherhood and social healing; it eschews revenge. It reminds us that reconciliation begins with our inner-self.

Building a culture of peace

Just as we seek to reconcile the different aspects of our personalities (reason and passion, spirit and matter), so too we must aspire to reconcile the many voices of truth as they manifest themselves within societies and culture.



Saira (second from right) with Indian friends at the 2005 Conflict Transformation Workshop

The absence of inner peace deprives us of the virtues of compassion, goodness and love of humanity beyond territories, boundaries and ideologies. When we analyse the societies of India and Pakistan, we find a general tendency towards violence, emotional outbursts and proliferation of conflicts at all levels.

Though the peace process is moving forward, more emphasis, in my opinion, should be laid on creating a

A GREAT GRAND-DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY

culture of peace in societies which will, in turn, lead to an abhorrence of hatred, violence, injustice and oppression. Moreover, relations between the two nations should be based on what we share in common. Only by being tolerant of their differences can India and Pakistan enjoy a healthy relationship.

Taking the less-travelled road

In her last days, my grandmother – who originally came from Delhi and later lived in Peshawar with her husband, my grandfather – used to ask the family to *at least* take her to Lahore. At the time that I heard this, I did not understand it. Now I feel that the partition generation sacrificed a great deal for their belief and ideology. I deeply respect their ideologies and religions, but I feel that they ought not to be converted in to a permanent wall of hatred.

The needs of the hour are these: acknowledging and respecting all beliefs *and* moving forward, instead of labelling each other as "the other" for generations to come. Such animosity may benefit the state, but it takes away the happiness of people which, in my view, is the very essence of their lives.

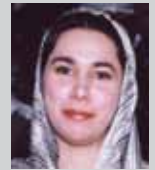
With state interests and ideologies overshadowing the voices of individuals, such change does appear to be a difficult task. Nonetheless, I hope to work towards new thought processes that will bring peace by transforming states, societies and people.

As the American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963) wrote of the challenges of choice,

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

~

Saira Bano Orakzai is a Lecturer at the Department of International Relations, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan.



BETWEEN TWO ESTRANGED NEIGHBOURS

KASHIF SAEED



I vividly remember the imminent prospects of a nuclear exchange between the two South Asian military giants of Pakistan and India that loomed large in the summer of 2002.

Just as I began to prepare for my university exams that were to take place in the last week of June 2002, I found myself in a limbo. As most of the world prepared to see India and Pakistan exchange nuclear salvos, I wondered whether those exams would take place at all.

It was a most frightening experience as politicians on both sides played the war tunes and emphasised a decisive victory over the enemy. However, some respite came when the million plus soldiers, locked eyeball-to-eyeball for months, retreated. People on both sides felt a sense of reprieve.

My real journey starts from this point, after the thaw in relations between India and Pakistan.

An ambassador for peace

In 2005, I represented the young people of Pakistan at UNESCO's International Conference on *Youth for Human Unity: Explorations for New Values through Inter-cultural and Inter-religious Dialogue* in the international township of Auroville located near Pondicherry in the deep south of India. At the conference, I deliberated upon the Pakistan-India conflict in depth. I made a number of presentations there on the India-Pakistan dialogue and on possible solutions to the Kashmir dispute.

At this conference, I met an Indian who had lost a brother and a friend in the Kargil conflict of 1999 between Pakistan and India. He warmly embraced me. While shedding tears for the dear ones he had lost, he also extended a hand of friendship with a prayer for peace between India and Pakistan.

This experience became one of the most moving moments of my life. The Indian's gesture will remain inscribed in my heart for a long time to come. It was, perhaps, this poignant incident which made me an ambassador for Indo-Pak peace and unity.

During that first visit to India in 2005, I could clearly see the desire of the public on both sides to live in amity, peace and tranquillity. Similarly, I feel, the governments

on both sides have also come to see that the time to resolve the bones of contention has arrived. That the time to start a new era of peace and progress in the subcontinent has arrived. If we failed to grasp the present opportunities for peace between India and Pakistan, my Indian friends and I agreed, another chance may never come our way again.

The former Indian Prime Minister, A. B. Vajpayee once remarked that friends could be changed, but never neighbours! Ever since I returned to Pakistan after that trip, I have been constantly emphasising the need for peace between the neighbours at every fora I attend. As a student at Peshawar University, I strove for the cause of Indo-Pak friendship. I personally spread the message of peace and harmony between our two countries and conveyed the good wishes of my Indian hosts to the Pakistani people. As a member of the Young Professional Network, I worked to spread the desire for peace in all my colleagues.

Human costs of conflict

I personally envisage a time when both India and Pakistan will wage a war against poverty. For me, the chief issue is that the subcontinent hosts half the world's poor. It is a matter of shame for both India and Pakistan that they annually spend billions of dollars on offensive capabilities, when their own people live in absolute poverty, hunger and disease.



Kashif Saeed at the Taj Mahal in Agra

I remember an incident that took place during my student days. The maid who worked in our house had lost her son in the Kashmir conflict. One day, she began to weep in our home and cursed "the religious elite who

incited the poor and disillusioned youth of Pakistan to fight *jihad* and end up in heaven while their own children sought education in the west". As my mother began to comfort her, my mind pondered over her ordeal, one that left a lasting impression on me. Afterwards, I wrote an article in a local newspaper condemning this hypocrisy of the misguided religious clergy.

Ever since, I have felt the human cost and deprivation of the conflict. The largest segment of society affected is women for they lose their sons, husbands and fathers in the unending conflict. In the last military build-up between India and Pakistan in 2002, nearly fifteen hundred army men lost their lives.

Closer to each other

Having visited India thrice as a representative of the Pakistani people, my experiences affirm the need to foster brotherly relations between the two estranged neighbours.

I can never forget the moment when I was leaving Delhi airport at the end of my first visit to India in March 2005. The Indian immigration officer, whose parents had belonged to Peshawar, virtually had tears in his eyes. He entreated me to visit India again.

I strongly feel that those tied by the commonality of blood, history and language have no option but to come closer to each other. And I remain an advocate of reconciliation between India and Pakistan.

Following my first visit in early 2005, I returned in June of the same year and then again in October to attend WISCOMP's Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Envisioning Futures*. It was an amazing experience to mingle with people belonging to every part of the subcontinent! During all three visits to India, I was able to achieve my objective of highlighting peace and friendship between the two proud nations of India and Pakistan to my utmost satisfaction.

~

Kashif Saeed is currently a Doctoral Scholar in Development Studies at UMB (The Norwegian University of Life Sciences), Aas, Norway.



Between Two Estranged Neighbours, the title of Kashif's story is a phrase borrowed from WISCOMP Founder & Hon. Director, Meenakshi Gopinath's personal narrative. In *Etchings on a Wave*, she writes: "Though Pakistan remained for many a lost frontier, for me there were no terms of estrangement, only a curious enchantment, with a horizon to be explored anew. I was to learn much later about how important the public acknowledgement and acceptance of the existence and identity of Pakistan by Indians was to the process of building trust between two estranged neighbours."

ON THE TAMIL NADU EXPRESS

ZAHID SHAHAB AHMED



My most valuable learning from WISCOMP's Annual Conflict Transformation Workshops is the realisation that people with a motivation for peacemaking must necessarily be equipped with skills in conflict resolution and conflict transformation.

Moreover, a peacemaker ought to learn to listen and should possess the insatiable urge to acquire more knowledge. All of these help avoid biases in the challenging task of analysing conflict dynamics.

This, then, is the essence of my experiences at WISCOMP's Third and Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshops *Dialogic Engagement* (2004), *Envisioning Futures* (2005) as well as my professional engagements in the field of conflict transformation.

Active peacemaking

When I took part in the 2004 Workshop, I was merely a sociologist, an "inactive", "indirect" peacemaker. My learning at that Workshop and through a WISCOMP Collaborative Award (for research on the attitudes of teachers in India and Pakistan) guided me to the United Nations-mandated University for Peace in Costa Rica for a Master's in Peace Education. Now, I am an *active* peacemaker with ongoing work assignments in South Asia.

Companions & conversations

In my life's experience, travelling brings everlasting lessons. However, this learning depends entirely on the mode of travelling as well as the attitudes of the passenger and his/her travel companions.

I am reminded of my train journey from Delhi to Chennai on the Tamil Nadu Express in February 2005. My friend Kashif, who hails from the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, accompanied me.

It was my second visit to India and Kashif's first. I had previously visited New Delhi and Agra for WISCOMP's Workshop in October 2004. Therefore, I had an idea of the climate in India, unlike Kashif, who was dressed in a winter *shalwar kameez* (very appropriate for the February weather in Peshawar).

We were traveling in the III AC sleeper coach and our cabin had three berths on each side. Therefore, we were

six passengers in the cabin: four Indians and two Pakistanis travelling together for two nights. Two of the Indian travellers were returning to their jobs in south India and two others to their homes from jobs in the north. The travellers formed a diverse group from the media, academia, public and corporate sectors.



Zahid Shahab Ahmed (second from right) and Kashif Saeed (extreme left) on the Tamil Nadu Express

Once we settled down and the train started moving, one of the Indians said to Kashif, "It must be very cold in Jammu?" At this, Kashif looked at me. He must have been stunned or scared. Or, perhaps, he did not understand the question.

I replied by asking another question, "Does he look like someone from Jammu?" My Indian co-passenger said, "Yes! Of course." I continued, "From which place do you think I come?" "You are, obviously, from the north," he answered. I smiled and told him that we were both from Pakistan.

Following this admission, we became the centre of attraction for all the Indian passengers in our cabin. Honestly speaking, I was a little cautious about disclosing our nationality. Before we visited India, we were both advised by our Pakistani friends and relatives to avoid train travel. However, sharing the truth with our Indian travellers created a comfort level in what became one of the most memorable journeys of my life.

More conversations

During the journey, we experienced the most wonderful manifestations of hospitality in this random friendship. None of us liked the meals served from the train pantry.

So, our Indian friends talked about the station where the train would stop next and how they could have the catering service bring our meals to the cabin. One of the Indians placed the order with the caterer after noting our food preferences. Of course, only vegetarian food was available there! We Pakistanis were astonished to observe these happenings and to find the food delivered in our cabin within a few minutes of the train reaching the next station. This food was much better than that served inside the train. Our thanks to the frequent Indian travellers!

We talked about all sorts of issues from politics and sports to Bollywood and Lollywood and learnt much during the course of those conversations. However, one of our Indian friends from Chennai constantly needed English translation as he could not understand Hindi. At times, even Kashif could not understand Hindi.

Connected in spirit

The train journey was a rare opportunity for me as I had only once travelled in a train in Pakistan in my adulthood. So, I decided to walk through all of the cabins. While doing so, I saw people from different social

classes and closely observed their magnificent human diversity. It seemed like a cultural film show to me, as I walked down the train and back watching what seemed like an amazing fruit salad of the human race.

By the end of the long thirty-six-hour journey to Chennai, we had all become good friends. One of our Indian friends invited us to visit him in New Delhi. We exchanged e-mail and postal addresses and I am still in touch with one of them. I remain connected with the others in spirit. Not only for adding colour to that train journey of mine, but also for making me appreciate the wishes of the common people on both sides for peace between India and Pakistan.

~

Zahid Shahab Ahmed is Programme Officer (Conflict Transformation and Conflict Sensitive Programme Management) with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Islamabad, Pakistan.



THE NECESSARY TYRANNY OF MEMORY

BIRAJ SWAIN



*What is poetry which does not save
Nations or people?
A connivance with official lies...*

– Czesław Miłosz (1911-2004), Polish poet & writer

When the world seems to be inexorably hurtling towards disaster, when the all-consuming passion of humanity appears equally divided between accumulation of material comfort and hatred of "the other", there seems to be little point in arguing for the saving grace of poetry.

The western Indian state of Gujarat, a state ripped down the middle by none other than the state itself, can still celebrate poetry because there are people there with the courage and conviction to stand up for democratic values and human dignity. Gujarat is lucky to have its fair share of committed activists working relentlessly towards peace and justice after the brutal violence of 2002. The celebration of poetry can also continue because of the choice victims make: to remember, no matter what.

My narrative is not that of activists working in Gujarat but that of the victims of state violence. Of their courage in living with the demands of a slow, apathetic criminal justice system which requires them to remember in spite of the pain. Notwithstanding the gruesome images, remember is, precisely, what they do.

A wife's story

Rashidabano Yusufkhan Pathan, a resident of Shahpur in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, was witness to the brutal attack on her husband, whose only crime was raising his voice against police inaction when a riotous mob went on a rampage. The police thrashed him in front of his wife and he died later the same day.

Not only were Rashidabano's attempts to register the First Information Report with the police thwarted, she was threatened as well. After a year and a half of attempting to be heard, Rashidabano finally got her

chance in October 2003 when she deposed in front of the Nanavati and Shah Commission, set up to inquire into the Godhra incident in Gujarat and its violent aftermath in 2002.

Instead of recording her deposition verbatim, attempts were made even here to delete the most crucial parts of her testimony regarding the action of the police. This, in spite of the fact that Rashidabano has been living – for nearly twenty months – with the graphic details of her husband being battered to death by the Gujarat police.

A daughter's story

In Himmatnagar in Gujarat's Sabarkantha district, Muslims driven out of their villages during the 2002 riots are being forced to withdraw their cases. This is the price of return.

The *gram panchayats*, India's much-touted symbol of grassroots democracy, are also being bullied into the conspiracy. The victims say that they felt safest when they willfully resisted all attempts of intervention by the state.

"We did not allow the state to enter and *that* is why there is peace here. Every time the state came, it came with

Hindu fundamentalists like the Bajrang Dal or the Vishwa Hindu Parishad who indulged in looting and murder. We took a conscious decision to keep the state out. That is why there is peace here in spite of the village of Popatpura being surrounded by 14 Hindu villages," states Yasmeen, a 30-year-old mother of three. Her father and brother were arrested under the false charges of rioting in Godhra town.



Biraj Swain (left, front row) at the Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, *Transcending Conflict*, 2003

"I still remember my parents being dragged into the police van. I remember their tearful eyes devoid of hope. I am waiting for my chance to narrate all this to the Commission at the upcoming hearing," said Yasmeen in August 2004. As I write these words in 2007, I wonder if she still remembers those hopeless eyes, that stony silence of her parents.

THE NECESSARY TYRANNY OF MEMORY

A mother's story

Sixty-year-old R Bibi, a former resident of Naroda Patia in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, once narrated to me the incident of the *tehsil* office demanding proof of her son's death in order that she could receive compensation. "They want proof. Where am I going to get the proof? My life was taken away when they shot my son. Everything has been taken away and now they want evidence. Where will I get the body from? I was not even able to see his body."

Of the dozens of people I spoke to in April 2003 after relocating to Gujarat and the hundreds I interacted with during my work there over the next year, none had been compensated for injury or loss of employment or livelihood. Muslims in Gujarat, already among the poorest communities in the state, had been further economically marginalised through ongoing economic boycotts instituted by Hindu nationalist leaders with the support of local officials. Many remain unable to farm their fields, sell their wares, return to their businesses, operate commercial vehicles or retain their jobs, including in the public sector. Muslims cannot work, reside or send their children to schools in Hindu-dominated localities. As the segregation continues, hopes for community dialogue and reconciliation are dissipating. All the above have contributed to the community's "ghettoisation". Walking through the so-called "ghettos", I had uncomfortable notions of forced poverty, manufactured penury and destroyed memories.

Lessons in remembering

Early in our school lives, we are taught that those who forget history are condemned to repeat it. I have always found comfort in the notion that time heals. Looking

back at my days in Gujarat after the violence of 2002, however, I feel a conflict. Now, I often wonder: Does time truly heal? Are those who forget history condemned to repeat it? At what price do they repeat it? Who pays for the amnesia?

For all my convenient celebration of forgetting and the healing abilities of time, Gujarat and its victims have taught me a completely different lesson.

Making victims re-visit their pain and remember details of the violence may be considered harsh and inhumane. While, on one hand, time brings healing, on the other hand, it becomes important to remember and not to forget. Even if at a cost to the emotional well-being of the victims and the larger population.

By removing these painful details from memory, we create a permanent wedge between the victims and the justice due to them. It is just these details that the perpetrators of the violence fear most. To maintain social pressure, therefore, keepers of the peace must do all they can to aid victims to remember. The memory of the victims can be the first weapon. Time that heals is also that which denies justice. Time can trivialise pain and forgetting can cleanse the guilty.

~

Biraj Swain is a Policy Research Officer with WaterAid India in New Delhi, India.



CONFLICT & HISTORY: IN DEFENCE

BHABANANDA TAKHELLAMBAM



To me, as a student of history, conflict marks the natural course of our evolution, mental and physical, social and cultural, economic and political. Without conflict, we will not be where we are today. Conflicts *have* happened, *are* happening and *will* happen. What is important is that we transform them positively.

Marx, revolution & change

If we were able to go back a little in time, say around 2000 years, we would learn how we traversed conflicting times to reach the present age. To understand the history of conflicts and their impact on the transformation of societies, I would like to bring in the philosopher Karl Marx.

According to Marx, there has been a constant struggle between a few haves, the bourgeoisies and the capitalists, on the one hand (who want to maintain the status quo) and the larger population of have nots, the proletariats and the peasants (who are exploited and want revolution to change systemic structures). His writings materialised with V. I. Lenin and the Great October Revolution of 1917. That was "capitalism's inevitable, revolutionary replacement by socialism" as predicted by Marx.

In Asia, it was Comrade Mao Tse-tung who brought change. Besides these two great revolutions, we also had the two world wars as well as other regional and civil wars. These conflicts have shaped and transformed our nations and societies making us what we are today. The struggle continues to date.

Conflicts in South Asia

South Asia is no exception; we have also had a turbulent history of conflict. Our modern history is marked by national struggles for independence and conflicts between nationalism and imperialism.

More turbulence followed on the eve and after the departure of the British in the form of the partition of British India and the process of nation building in new India. In the first case, the conflict was for power and identity between the leaders of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. This conflict led to the birth of India and Pakistan, the two most hostile nations in South Asia.

In the second case, the conflict was between the princely states and a nascent India. Though India was successful

in subduing/annexing the rebellious princely states into the Indian Union under the iron man of Indian unification, some struggles survive in new forms until the present. The struggles for self-determination in Kashmir and the northeast of India are examples.

The witness of history

History bears witness to the chaos of conflict and records all events and facts. However, it is *not* the cause of these conflicts. On the contrary, lack of knowledge or misinterpretations of history lead to conflicts. When history is ignored in the resolution of conflicts, it further aggravates the issue. A clear understanding of the antecedents of a conflict greatly aid in transforming it.

I wish people could erase their biases and see history for what it is. For, history is not the judge of events. It is universal, as facts and events are, whether or not one likes them.

The facts of history

War is ghastly and merciless; it brings only death and destruction. We have, for example, the holocaust and Hiroshima. The writings of the Allies justify the Axis expansion (of Germany in Europe and Japan in Asia) as the main causes for the war. But, was not Britain the coloniser of half the world at that time? Without attempting to justify German nationalism or Japanese militarism, I would like to state that the Allies interpreted facts to justify their own actions, namely the annihilation of the Third Reich and the bombing of Japan.

In his famous treatise *What is History*, E. H. Carr states that data (events and facts) and subjectivity (the interpretation of events and facts) are pitfalls one cannot avoid in history. One should be as objective as possible in interpreting data and writing history. The facts of history are like fishes in an ocean: the facts that you collect and interpret depend on the field that you choose to collect your data from; just as the type of fish you catch depends on the part of the ocean, you choose to fish in.

Here is an interesting story. A man wanted to enjoy a cigarette after dinner. As he had run out of cigarettes, he walked out of his house to buy a packet. While crossing the road, he was run over by a speeding car. He died on the spot. A police officer recorded the facts involved in

the making of the event: the car was going too fast; the bend on the road was too sharp; the street was poorly lit. He also recorded the fact that the victim was on his way to buy a cigarette.

Many years later, a researcher collecting information on the history of road accidents for the formulation of safety policies chanced upon this data. The researcher used all the facts listed by the police officer except one. That the victim was a smoker, who was hit on his way to buy a cigarette. The researcher overlooked this fact because it was irrelevant to his research. It would be silly to draw the conclusion that road accidents could be minimised if only people stopped smoking! Similarly, if one misinterprets the facts of history to suit his/her own social, economic or political ends, it would be akin to linking smoking to accident rates.

Civil war in Sri Lanka

Let us look at the three major issues that haunt South Asia to analyse historical facts and check if history is the cause of conflict in these cases and to ascertain whether it could serve as a guide in transforming conflict.

At a conference I attended in Sri Lanka in 2005, a fellow scholar presented a paper titled *Competing Ideologies of Development: A Legacy of 1956 Politics*. It was an interesting paper, except for my surprise at how carefully the author had avoided mentioning the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in her entire paper!

The civil war in Sri Lanka is among the most pressing conflicts in present times. The legacy of 1956 politics remains one of the main causes for the Tamil liberation movement. In 1956, for instance, legislation was introduced to make Sinhala the only official language of the country. The senate was abolished in 1971. A tragedy of errors followed. In *The Right to Self-determination: A Time for Reinvention and Renewal*, Nihal Jayawickrama writes:

“The failure of the traditional Tamil leadership to secure autonomy through constitutional means inevitably led to the emergence of Tamil youth power in the form of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: a new generation of marginalised, militant young men and women, born and bred in the north in the frustrating environment of unrelenting conflict with the Sinhalese government.”

During the conference, an academician remarked that Sri Lanka was moving towards another cycle of violent conflict owing to the government's belief in a military solution. Years of efforts towards peace negotiations and accords lie in shambles. Unless the tragedy of errors is addressed, the solution to the civil war in Sri Lanka appears distant.

The history of partition

The partition of British India that shaped the political ideologies and geographies of the subcontinent is still fresh in our minds. The stories of the miseries of partition are being told and re-told. The partition was a political decision resulting from conflicts of identity and is a classic case of the politicisation of history. The events and facts of that history *cannot* be changed. Neither must we attempt it. What is important is reconciliation. Many of the events surrounding the partition arouse indignation and hate. Instead, if we attempt to understand the antecedents and precedents of that event, we can learn from the past and avoid such conflicts in the future.

The alienation of Kashmir

The conflicts in Kashmir and Northeast India remain dark spots in so-called "India Shining". Nationalism and nation building in India have been problematic. Criticising the nationalist class in *Nationalism Without a Nation in India*, G. Aloysius writes:

“The nationalist class was nothing but the desperate and traditionally dominant castes and communities gathered together in their interest to preserve their traditional dominance, on the one hand, over the lower caste masses, and to enlarge their area of dominance in the new political



Bhabananda (centre) with fellow participants and members of the WISCOMP team during *Collaborative Explorations*, the Fifth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, 2006

society, on the other... Gandhi was a true Congressman and fought in every available forum that it was with the Congress alone that the British should settle power.”

The Government of India Act 1935 to create an All India Federation was a missed opportunity that could have reduced the friction of the nation building exercise and perhaps, even of the partition of India. "In fact, the nationalist movement was at least as preoccupied with how to exclude other groups from power, as how to appropriate it from the British". B.R. Ambedkar has rightly commented that the slogan of nationalism was being raised not to sacrifice anything but to reinforce the nationalists' own traditional privileges. The ascription of power and hegemonic dominance over the former princely states at the periphery were evident in independent India. This has resulted in current conflicts in Kashmir and the northeast of India.

Kashmir's connection with India was based on the formal Delhi agreement of 1952 (in which Article 370 was created in the Indian Constitution to ensure regional autonomy for the state) and the pledge of plebiscite committed by the Indian leaders at the United Nations. Then, it appears that the Kashmiris were betrayed. In *Quest for Self-Determination in the Indian Sub-continent: The Recent Phase*, Anjoo S. Upadhyaya writes:

“What alienated the Kashmiris was the gradual erosion of the special status of Kashmir, the denial of their democratic rights through rigged elections and the blatant interference of the centre in order to influence its own position in the state.”

The Kashmiris' slogan of "Kashmiriyat" (an independent identity for the Kashmiris) was regarded as a threat to the territorial integrity of the nation by the central government of India. Over the years, the situation has deteriorated to the extent that alleviation of the feelings of Kashmiris by any Indian overture now seems unlikely.

The burning northeast

The states of northeast India have been variously praised. India's first prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru called Manipur "the Switzerland of the East". Others have referred to Shillong as "the Scotland of the East". However, owing to the flames ignited by the

misadventures of successive governments at the centre as well as centre-controlled state governments, these beautiful places are now burning.

Many of the self-determination movements in the northeast predate Indian independence. Following its forced annexation into the Indian Union in 1949, Manipur was relegated to the status of a "Part C State". This was regarded as a humiliating act by the martial race of Manipuris. By 1949, the Manipur State Constitution Act had been established and the first general assembly elections held. The king remained the head of Manipur and powers of governance were vested in the state assembly. However, the state of Manipur had to struggle for 12 years to acquire full statehood within the Indian Union. The highhanded attitude of the central government frustrated many young people who picked up arms in line with the revolutionary ideas of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism. Armed struggle for an independent Manipur continues till date.

Likewise, the government's poor handling of the student agitation against foreigners in Assam led to the birth of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in the state. India has also miserably failed in working towards a solution to the Naga issue.

The guide of history

History bears witness to all conflicts and records the facts of each case. It also records the progress/resolution of conflicts, for better or for worse, over time.

Conflict is rooted in historical development. There is a cause for every conflict. History tells us what these causes are; it is *not* the cause. It is true, however, that history may miss recording every fact. In addition, interpretation of a historical event may differ from one school of thought to another. It is up to us to objectively and wisely understand the causes and sequence of conflicts from history with the aim of transforming it into peace.

~

Bhabananda Takhellambam teaches History at Manipur University, Imphal, India.





DATELINE SRINAGAR

SYED SARWAR KASHANI

As I click the reverse push button of my memory, the flashbacks do not seem that distant. Space has been displaced much but time seems to have frozen since. My psyche recoils even now at the thought of that first gunshot, which suppressed the melody of the calm valley.

DECEMBER 5, 1989, 4:30 PM

What is freedom?

After a long hectic day at school, walking back home along with my two younger sisters and some classmates was always fun. For the past few weeks, however, something had stolen that simple bliss. An unseen fear rent the air. Apprehension was visible on innocent faces and trepidation had replaced their smiles.

As I reached Jamia Masjid in downtown Srinagar on the way home, I saw hoards of people in a procession shouting anti-India slogans. I can clearly remember the flashing banners: "We want freedom", "Stop human rights violations", "Indian dogs go back".

Too naïve to understand the meaning and context of these slogans, I felt overwhelmed by the mob and rushed home. There, I asked my father what human rights violations meant. "What is 'freedom'?" I enquired.

My father recalled asking his father the same question in the late 1950s. "Kashmir is a divided territory between India and Pakistan," Papaji explained to me. "It is a story of broken promises. We have been denied the right to determine our political future. You see the recent elections (of 1987) were marred by massive rigging in favour of New Delhi's darlings," he continued, talking of the abuse of democratic freedoms in Kashmir.

Then my father narrated an anecdote my grandfather had told him. "There was a dog at a rich man's house. The dog had a nice kennel to live in and used to enjoy meat and bones every day. One day, this dog encountered some stray dogs and started boasting about the delicacies he was fed and his cozy kennel.

"I have all of life's luxuries," he said. "Do you?"

"No," replied the stray dogs, "but we have the freedom to go anywhere at any time and do whatever we please. We are not ruled; we rule ourselves."

The next day, I could not go to school. The situation had worsened and all schools had to be prematurely closed for the winter vacations.

DECEMBER 21, 1989

Open fields & graveyards

After offering prayers at a local mosque, I lay down to bask in the December sunshine. A bang woke me up. It was a gunshot. *Oh my God! Not again.* I thought that the police might be chasing an unruly mob. I did not know then that it was quite the opposite.

A neighbour came rushing. "What happened?" I enquired.

"Two masked youth holding big guns opened fire and gave the police the run," the neighbour narrated. The bugle of war had been sounded. What followed was bleeding history.

People killed. Blood splattered on roads. Childhoods robbed by relentless terror. The chastity of women assaulted. Bunkers at every nook and corner. The roar of AK 47s. Military *khaki* replacing the green of the valley. Restricted movements and complete curfews. Everyone suspected of being terrorists. The brutal hand of the army and paramilitary troopers reigned. Fear ruled the roost. The "other" guns – that of militants – also contributed their bit. Open fields turned to graveyards.

One evening, while we were having dinner, hundreds of gunshots pierced the calmness of the dark. Fear revisited us with a bang. Lights were put out and gates locked from the outside so the military would think nobody lived where we did. The next day I counted nine shrouded bodies, which included some members of the same family.

The *mujahideen* (as the militants were called then) of Al Madad Mujahideen led by the dreaded commander, Jamsheed Khan, had attacked a patrol of the Central Reserve Police Force. The locals were gunned down in retaliatory fire, the neighbours narrated.

This living nightmare permanently colonised our minds. For the next few days, thousands of people in and around our locality left their homes in the evening to stay overnight at the shrine of Makhdoom Sahib.

JANUARY 3, 1990

Firing

Thousands of people marched towards the office of the United Nations Military Observers Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) in Srinagar to present a memorandum. At the Zakura crossing near Hazratbal, armed forces resorted to unprovoked firing, killing 26 civilians. In a separate incident later the same day, 21 people were killed at Tengpora Bypass, when forces opened fire at the civilians travelling back to their homes after presenting the memorandum to the UN office.

JANUARY 21, 1990

Wani's death

Forces fired indiscriminately at peaceful protesters at Gaw Kadal, Srinagar. Sixty dead bodies lay at the spot. Abdur Rauf Wani, a 24-year-old graduate, took nearly 32 bullets from a light machine gun, thus, saving many others.

JANUARY 25, 1990

More firing

At Handwara in north Kashmir, forces shot dead 17 civilians who were marching peacefully.

MAY 21, 1990

Innocent killings

At least 59 people were put to death by the Indian armed forces resorting to firing on unarmed civilian mourners, who were carrying the dead body of late Mirwaiz Molvi Mohammed Farooq. Earlier, Mirwaiz had been shot dead by militants at his residence.

History is replete with such innocent killings. The militants did not spare the common Kashmiri either. Hundreds of civilians were brutally executed on suspicion of being *mukhbir* (army informers or Intelligence Bureau agents). Some were hanged to death, others blown apart with explosives or slaughtered.

The new climate of war

By this time, the wave of *azadi* (independence) swayed everyone. One and all were shouting *Hum kya chahte, azadi, Yahan kya chalega, Nizam-e-Mustafa; Pakistan se rishta kya, La ila ha ill Allah; and, Azadi ka ek hi dung, Guerrilla jung guerrilla jung*. Slogans reverberated from every mosque loudspeaker and drowned the entire

population in an engrossing political and Islamist chorus. Every youth talked about crossing over (to Pakistan for arms training). Groups of boys would secretly leave their home in the darkness of night and travel across the Line of Control to procure arms and gain training.

The people's routine took a surprising turn. Even our colloquial vocabulary changed. Among the most commonly used terms were *crackdown, firing, curfew, LMG, Kalashnikov, gun powder, pistol, garnate* (grenade), *miltan* (militant), *mujahid, apor tarow* ("Let's cross over to the other side, Pakistan").

Time passed by fast. The *azadi* sentiment gained more and more popularity. A local boy who had crossed over clandestinely and returned with a booming gun suddenly became a hero. Violence brought with it glamour as well; but, the Islamist tinge to the struggle was becoming ever more fervent. Every house became a militant hideout due to either support for or fear of the movement.

Militants, with guns constantly slung over their shoulders, would visit our house and get royal treatment. They would narrate their plight quite glamorously. "When we were crossing back to this side, we had an encounter with the Indian army. We killed dozens of them" was the usual story. "While crossing over, we did not eat anything for days together. Sometimes, we would eat grass. This is what makes a *mujahid*," they would tell me – then, a 12-year-old boy.

I began fantasising about the gun. Late at night, my fingers would fidget. I would rub my hands on make-believe guns and flirt with the danger.

1992

The urge to leave

Years passed by and situation worsened with every passing day. By 1992, militancy was at its peak, both in terms of strength and popular support.

Day in and day out, mullahs in mosques preached the *jihad fee sabee lillah* (The struggle for Allah only) as per their own interpretations. On the night of Shab-e-Qadr [the 27th night of the holy month of Ramadhan when the first Quranic revelation was brought down from heaven to the Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.)], a young cleric in our locality narrated a story of two young *mujahids*, only ten and twelve years of age, who had died

fighting. The speech was powerful and invoked pro-jihad feelings. For sometime, I felt I was sinning by not joining the *mujahids*.

Then, there were the *jihadi* songs.

*Jaago jaago subha hui
Masjid-e-Aqsa roti hai kyon
Yeh tabahi hoti hai....*

*Wake up now. It is already dawn.
The Al-Aqsa mosque is crying to be saved.
Why this devastation?*

The cassettes brought along with guns from across were played in mosques continuously to mould young minds. There were also local Kashmiri songs. *Woin mouj ba draas jehadas akh, dua-e-khair kaerizeam* ("O my mother, I have set out for jihad now. Please do pray for me").

I too wanted to leave everything and cross over. Wanted to be *mujahid*! Wanted to fight for the people of my land! Wanted to fight for Islamic sovereignty! The fervour for *jihad* became more effervescent. I firmly decided to leave to follow "the right cause". However, I did not want to run away without seeking the permission and the blessings of my parents. At the same time, I had no courage to speak to my mother about this.

A letter seeking permission

One night, when the *jihadi* sentiment grew strong, I wrote a letter in Urdu addressed to my parents.

*Jab jihad ke liye bhula ya gaya hai tou mera isse munh
chhupana kafirana ho ga. Meri jihad ke liye umar ho gayi
hai and main chhata hoon ki aap mujhe Allah O Rabbul
Izzat ke raaste par chalne se na rokain aur duaon ke saath
mujhe jaane ki ijaazat den.*

When Muslims have been called for jihad, I think my non-participation would be infidelity on my part. I am not too young to be a warrior. I want you to kindly permit me to offer myself to the path of the Almighty, who deserves all the praises.

I left the letter under my pillow. The next evening Mummy and Papaji called me.

"We cannot stop you from fighting for the cause of Allah. We appreciate your spirit. If you do something for the Almighty, we will also reap the fruit in heaven tomorrow," they advised. I started giving my thanks to the Almighty. Within seconds, I was fighting the Indian army in my mind, even dying a martyr.

"But don't you think you are still too young to fight?" Mummy brought me back to real life.

"*Jihad*," she began interpreting, "is a struggle within one's self to submit to Allah. To fight the evil within one's self. To achieve higher moral and educational standards."

"But *jihad* is also physical struggle. It is also the defence of Muslims when they are prevented from worshipping Allah. *Jihad* is also retribution against tyranny," I argued.

"Yes, my dear," said Mummy, with tears in her eyes.

Papaji also nodded looking strong and said, "You defined it better than I could have. But, when addressing humans, Allah says in the Quran, 'Affala Taaqiloon!' ['You have the logical sense (to make decisions)']. Let us wait. Things are not politically too clear as of now."

My parents seemed not only to be talking to a son but also interpreting the entire political imbroglio in a full-fledged discourse. I began thinking otherwise then.

2007

Almost

Today, Mummy and Papaji stand corrected. Almost.

~

Syed Sarwar Kashani works with the Indo-Asian News Service, New Delhi, India.



THEY WHO WAIT

SEEMA SHEKHAWAT



For the people of Kashmir, divided families have been a harsh reality since the late 1940s when the partition of the subcontinent took place.

Separated families

The partition was followed by the first war of 1947 between India and Pakistan in the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) when the Maharaja of the state acceded to India following the intrusion of armed groups backed by Pakistan, including troops disguised as local tribesmen. On January 1, 1949, the United Nations negotiated a ceasefire. The ceasefire line – that later came to be referred to as the Line of Control (LoC) – left a major portion of the erstwhile J&K state under Pakistani control. This territorial division severed many villages and separated family members from each other. Consequently, thousands of families in the border areas of J&K came to be permanently divided. The region witnessed the separation of families yet again during the wars of 1965 and 1971 between India and Pakistan.

The human dimension

For a long time, the humanitarian dimension of the conflict has remained in the shadow of its political facets. People on both sides of the LoC share religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and emotional ties but have not been able to meet each other after the 1940s. Despite all odds, the divided families on both sides of the LoC retain a ray of hope that they will reunite with their loved and separated ones. This craving to meet long-separated relatives became a reality when India proposed the opening of bus routes to allow people on both sides of Kashmir to meet each other. After initial hiccups, Pakistan agreed to the proposal, widely viewed as the "mother of all confidence building measures" and aimed at strengthening the ongoing peace process.

Open roads

The opening of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad road in April 2005 was the first step towards providing the divided families opportunities to meet each other. The initiative was a beginning that ushered in a new era for the people of the region.

However, the most number of divided families in the Indian state of J&K are in the districts of Rajouri and Poonch in the Jammu region. Keeping this in view, the Poonch-Rawalakote route was later opened to

facilitate the reunification of the families. Presently, there is a demand to open more routes in the Jammu region.

Despair & hope

Despite these positive developments, the misery of the people of Kargil (in Ladakh in the Indian state of J&K) and Skardu (in the Northern Areas under Pakistani control) has remained invisible. There are many divided families in these areas, some of whom were separated in the late 1940s and others in 1971.

My visit to Kargil in July 2006 brought forth many untold stories of the deep urge of people to meet their relatives in the Northern Areas and of their discontent with the unenthusiastic attitude of the government of Pakistan in facilitating meetings among divided families. Badgam village situated on a hilltop near the LoC in Kargil is home to many divided families. Almost everyone in the village has suffered the pain of separation, which, in turn, has brought about irreparable changes in their lives.

Such separations have wide-ranging implications: emotional, social, cultural and economic. As is the case elsewhere in Kashmir, many separated family members have died without being able to see their loved ones. Yet others continue to live with the hope of reunion.

Hundreds of stories can be told of separated parents and their children waiting to meet each other once again. The saddest cases are of women separated from their husbands. Many still hope for a reunion with their husbands in the near future. Others have died with this hope. Some women were divorced by their husbands, who remained in Gilgit-Baltistan. Many of them have married again; but some continue to remain single.

The only mode of communication between divided families is the occasional letter. Even this often takes a long time to reach its destination. Divided families regularly learn of the death of their loved ones after several weeks, as the letters take more than a month to reach the other side of the LoC.

Family voices

It would not be out of context here to quote some people who are desperately longing to see their relatives across the LoC. Shafqat Hussain is eager to meet his cousin

THEY WHO WAIT

who lives in Skardu. "I am just waiting for a bus to roll down the Kargil-Skardu road to reunite with my cousin. A distance of less than two hundred kilometers has become too long to cover," he says.

Eighty-year-old Tabassum is on her death bed. Her last wish is to see her daughter who lives in the Northern Areas. "I wish I am alive till I see my daughter and grand children," she hopes. "The recent opening of the roads in other parts of J&K has raised my hopes. I will not be able to die peacefully if I do not see them."

Mariam, now 65, was separated from her husband following the war of 1971. "I am in contact with my husband through occasional letters," she admits. "I have raised my children all alone and married them off. Despite being married, I have faced the ordeal of leading a widow's life all these years. I do not know if I will be able to see my husband in this life time but hope keeps me alive."

Ashraf Beig, 45, also has a poignant story to tell. "I was three years old when we got separated from my father. My father did not divorce my mother but he married again in the Northern Areas. My mother devoted herself to bringing us up. She has suffered most due to the division. At my wedding, a village elder acted as my father. It was a very emotional moment. My mother died last year waiting to meet my father. I do not know if I would be able to meet him as he is very old," laments Beig.

Near yet far

Skardu (where most of these divided families reside) is less than two hundred kilometers from Kargil and can be reached from here by road in a few hours. At present, however, people have to embark on long journeys of more than one thousand kilometers via the Wagah route in Punjab or the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad route to reach Skardu.

Similarly, it needs to be mentioned here that despite being parts of the erstwhile princely state of J&K, the two parts of Pakistan-administered Kashmir are not directly connected. To reach Gilgit-Baltistan, one has to

travel to Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, and then take the Karakoram highway.

Childhood memories

There are others with no kith or kin in the Northern Areas but who are natives of the place. Many who crossed into Ladakh when Gilgit and Baltistan came under Pakistani control are now eager to see the place of their birth.

Says Abdul Qadir, "No one can ever forget the place of his birth. I have spent my childhood in Skardu and am eager to see it again. The permit system to visit the other side should also be extended to natives of the place with no relatives there. We do not have relatives there but we do have friends. Moreover, our childhood memories haunt us."

The road ahead

It is against this background of loss and longing that the people of Kargil wait to see the Kargil-Skardu road open. Meanwhile, the opening of the proposed strategic route between Kargil and Skardu continues to face several roadblocks.

The re-opening of the route could translate into renewed tourism, energised local economies, growing trade and a measure of confidence. It would also be a cost-effective and timesaving measure. The humanitarian dimension involved in opening up this route remains a prominent issue and could mark the end of a long wait for family reunions. Opening the Kargil-Skardu road will not only solve a major humanitarian crisis, it will also go a long way in cementing cultural bonds.

~

Seema Shekhawat is presently associated with WISCOMP as a *Scholar of Peace* Fellow.



REDEMPTION

ATHER ZIA



In 1991, I – then a young Kashmiri Muslim teen – was waiting in the historic Lal Chowk of Srinagar for my friend, a Kashmiri Pandit girl.

I stood outside the only gift shop in Kashmir at that time, excited at this "out alone for the first time" expedition and looking forward to a fun afternoon. I kept searching for the familiar face with a golden dusting of freckles and light eyes framed by blonde hair.

Our time of meeting came and passed. She never came.

The phone in her home kept ringing and the only other contact I had for her, conveyed that she had gone out of the valley and would return after some time.

I was ponderous and waited.

Days turned into months.

I soon realised that the answer to the very personal question of her leaving so suddenly, was not a point of banter between us. Instead, its explanation turned out to be very public, tragic, and of a deep political nature.

Awkward meetings

Most of the Pandit population drained from the valley soon after; pouring into Jammu and elsewhere. During the years that ensued, their presence became a rarity.

Many Kashmiri Muslims visiting Jammu or Delhi would narrate anecdotes about meeting their old Pandit neighbours as if they were recalling the sighting of a rare comet.

I too met many of my family friends and other acquaintances; mostly in the flurry of crowded malls or marketplaces. The noise would be a perfect excuse for not being able to hear each other properly. The jostling kept us from touching. We hurried away, maybe without even meeting each other's eyes.

I ran into my teachers, neighbours, family friends and other acquaintances during the years. Our meetings were restrained and awkward; usually drowned in the hubbub. These memories were filed away in utter discomfiture.

I would always wonder what to make of the chasm of silence that bubbled noisily between those brief words we exchanged. This quandary was to last a very long time.

Broken silences

Circa December 2000.

I was invited to attend *Breaking the Silence*, a Roundtable arranged by WISCOMP to contextualise the issues and concerns of Kashmiri women for a wider audience. Women from different communities, Muslims, Pandits, Sikhs etc., were to participate in the session titled *Perspectives from Kashmir*.

It was almost after a decade that most of us from Kashmir would be seeing our Pandit brethren in such a close setting. The meeting was not easy.

I had sensed some anxiety the night before the conference, as everyone poured into the venue; the air was filled with restraint and apprehensiveness.

Intense arguments

The next day, edgy perfunctories coupled with an absence of common banter loomed ominously over the conference. The conversation progressed from participant narratives and short decorous discussions to intense arguments punctuated with grudges and blames that flew rapidly over the heads of the moderators.



Ather (third from left) with the *Athwaas* team in Kashmir. Also seen here, Kshama Kaul (second from right).

Neerja Matto, a Pandit English professor and one of the moderators, issued her now legendary diktat to the confronting panelists: "Kshama, Kshama, Kshama." She was trying to rein in the angry exchange between Kshama Kaul, a Jammu-based Pandit poet and Qurrat-ul-Ain, a Muslim professor from the valley.

REDEMPTION

Prof. Mattoo used Kshama's name, which means "forgiveness", many times over to stop the angst-fuelled barrage between them. Although she had meant to use her words in a lighter vein to ease the altercation and especially entreat Kshama, the more strident one, her words stood out as most apt for the moment.

Forgiveness, I thought, was the best place to start. It had the miraculous power to relinquish anger and fury and was a peerless luxury in a stress-driven world.

Personally, I had not been a part of the confrontational repartees between the participants. Being amongst the younger panelists, I represented students and entry-level participants. Maybe I was fortunate to be from an age group, which had a different kind of historical baggage and as such, did not comprehend the level of tension that the meeting had invoked between the older groups.

Childhood memories

When the Pandits had started leaving the valley, I was still in school. For us, the differences along religious lines meant precious little, especially in a school where our English accent and knowledge of pop music presaged our status and defined our fate.

I surmise that the time of my growing up had probably been an interlude when the differences between the Muslim and Pandit communities were being bridged, at least as far as education and consequent social standing were concerned.

My parents were educated, were both doctors and had several Pandit friends. We had strong relationships with them, apparent in their giving my brother a pet name and taking care of arrangements for my aunt's wedding. Even my closest friend was a Pandit girl.

I have fond childhood memories from when my parents were posted in a remote village where we shared the government quarters with a Pandit family. I can still taste the mushrooms in yoghurt that they shared with us during dinner and the spicy beans we took over for their Sunday brunch. I remember how our families took turns to fetch milk and groceries.

The tap of a racquet on the shuttlecock is still fresh in my ears as their kids played long sessions of badminton

under the shade of apple trees, while I kept the score; a role that I loved (I hated sports of all kinds).

In another kind of incident which is a total contrast to my earlier recollection, my teacher's brother barred me from entering their kitchen, as I was a Muslim, and I was also told so by their grandmother in no uncertain words.

I thought it a common occurrence in our culture, as I had heard similar snatches of information exchanged in my family now and then. Just as one would hear about a favorite cousin's bad pimples. They were truly insignificant.

Hidden grudges

Looking back now, I am forced to rethink the relationship between the two communities. Perhaps it would not be unwise to suggest that the socio-religious differences between the two communities, pre-1989, should be explored and understood in order to comprehend the events that ensued. Not that any level of difference can mandate what happened, but the political, sociological, religious, and economic infrastructure that existed in Kashmiri society needs to be contextualised, if we must arrive at an understanding of the sudden animosity that tore the two communities asunder. There are signs to indicate that the apparent harmony might have been a form of communal truce, which needed very little provoking to be shattered.

I got a glimpse of this less-talked about (but still palpable) aspect of our communal legacy when I interviewed two octogenarian friends, a Pandit and a Muslim, both well-known academicians. Ironically, the subject of the interview was communal harmony. Their answers, initially friendly and even complimentary, steadily turned into a blame game that did not cease even after the arrival of *kahwa*, the fragrant Kashmiri beverage made of saffron and green tea.

Like frenzied magicians, they out pulled grudge after grudge from the hats of their histories.

"Remember how we used to go into your home cleaning the latrines and wait far behind as you chose the best piece of meat at the butcher," recalled the Muslim friend. To this the Pandit friend retorted, "What did you

expect? To sit on our heads? What else would your uneducated community do for a living?"

Such rare personalised glimpses into history are lacking in public and academic discourses. Exploring such narratives may hold the key to understanding the social exchanges that existed at the subliminal level, even when there was an apparent environment of external communal harmony.

Warm handshakes

Although Kashmir still dwelled in a haze of political unpleasantness and violence, WISCOMP enabled a group of women from Jammu and the valley to find common ground and bridge the gap between the two communities, following the roundtable.

In the end, the edgy exchanges that ensued during the roundtable birthed *Athwaas*, which in Kashmiri means "handshake". With *Athwaas*, began a grassroots effort to visit each other's reality and pave a path for empathy.

The first confrontation between the estranged compatriots at the WISCOMP roundtable had played a cathartic role and generated a common sentiment of wanting to evolve some reconciliatory measures. Once they were achieved, empathy and compassion, we believed, would lead us to reconciliation and, hopefully, even to a solution, whatever that may be.

Renewed kinship

First as a journalist and later as an administrator in the valley, there were not many chances to distance myself from the roles I had in my professional and personal lives. Nor was there any respite from the political system surrounding me. Like countless others, I was a victim, mired in the fallouts of Kashmiri struggle, the restive Indo-Pak relationship and the human rights abuses pounding life out of the valley.

The space we created with *Athwaas* and other similar efforts became our only chances to understand and travel into the realities of important but invisible aspects of the conflict. At times, we transcended our beings and barriers to understand each other's predicament.

As we journeyed together inside and outside Kashmir through *Athwaas*, there was a revival of the old Pandit-Muslim kinship between the members. The

constant dialogue dispelled callous myths that had coated our hearts over years of separation.

Beautiful transformations

Over the course of two years, the transformation in us was amazing. This realisation dawned on me as I sat enjoying the sunset with Kshama in Baramulla, Kashmir, during a village visit to set up a project. Sitting outside the government bungalow, Kshama, who had been so deeply charged during the roundtable, read my poems in a delicate voice and deciphered my words for me.

As I read her poems and explored the depths of her emotions, we were surprised at how close we were in being able to understand what our words meant to the other. As we grasped at the meanings, suffused with suffering and hope, our tears flowed.

In that one true moment, our journey together shone in our hearts, as we realised how excruciatingly similar our pain and trauma was.

In that one moment, we realised that the spaces that we had been able to create beyond politics and ideology stood on nothing but the foundation of universal compassion. This compassion manifested itself regularly as we progressed in our journey. On the one hand, members like Kshama would weep with women languishing in victimhood, as they travelled within the valley into places nestling along the border with Pakistan. On the other hand, Qurrat and others from the valley would bemoan the woes of migrants in camps around Jammu. The degree of empathy for each other's suffering kept growing as did the laughter when we talked late into nights or stole time for an odd movie now and then.

New bonds

Athwaas rallied support from women folk in the valley and in migrant camps forming small pathways that promised to grow into constituencies of peace.

During one such journey in the Muthi camp, a bright young Pandit boy, who had lost his father and brother since leaving Kashmir, sat in a corner of the room jotting frantically in his notebook. His grandfather sat silently near him while his mother entreated us to "end the blame game, for it is evident that the Pandits were suffering and the Muslims were suffering far more."

REDEMPTION

Her son, whom I will call Amit for purposes of privacy, looked at us shyly and volunteered to read a poem he had written. The poem was about his home and his hope to return to his motherland. When he addressed me as "didi", an instant brother-sister bond took shape between us.

As I was editing a literary magazine in those days, I became interested in publishing his poems. He promised to submit his poems personally during an upcoming visit to the valley in connection with a job offer. "It would also give me a chance to meet you again," he added with a shy smile. Being curious, I asked, "Why do you want to live in the valley?" "Why do you?" he quipped back. It was a fair answer.

After my return to the valley, Amit called a couple of times and kept in touch. When he arrived in Kashmir, he (true to his word) came to visit and submit his poems. Since he wrote in Hindi, we took a long time translating them into Urdu. In the meanwhile, we also talked about his future aspirations.

Meeting him reminded me of the waiting – in 1991 – for my friend, who never turned up. Here I was, talking to this enterprising boy, who must have left under the exact same circumstances (as my friend) and who was now returning to the valley. The trust and friendship that suffused the bond we forged reinforced my hope for our future.

Peaceful spaces

The experience enabled me to create a space within myself, duly reflected in my efforts, where there was no

conflict, only resolution. This redeeming meeting still lives with me and in the following words,

At least till you
caress the trembling fronds,
as droplets from the last night's storm
mingle with neryv waters,
and see your reflection
and still like what you see –
the world will be a place of love!

I refuse to believe nothing can be salvaged
of this world,
life, love, compassion
till that brave spark in your eyes
believes me, my pain –
the world will be a place of love!

I refuse to believe nothing can be salvaged
till you and I
are what we are meant to be,
till then –
the world will be a place of love!

~

Ather Zia is currently pursuing graduate studies in Journalism in California, USA.



WOMEN & THE PEOPLE'S WAR

BABITA BASNET



Approximately thirteen thousand people have lost their lives in the ten years between 1996, when the Maoist commenced the people's war, and 2006. Several hundreds of others have been disabled or displaced. A large number have simply disappeared.

According to the statistics of the National Human Rights Commission, a total of 12,865 people have lost their lives (8283 people at the hands of the state and 4582 at the hands of the Maoists) in the conflict till November 30, 2005. Sources put the numbers of the disappeared at approximately 5000. During the decade-long conflict, numerous ceasefire attempts failed. As a result, attacks, kidnappings and arrests spread from the villages to the cities of Nepal. Finally, the April movement of 2006 followed by the peace process paved the way for the Constituent Assembly.

"Can you imagine..?"

Although the country is moving ahead politically after a long period of war, life will never be the same again for the families of the 13,000 people who have lost their lives in the conflict. Or for those displaced. These victims of conflict are yet to find any peace.

Prema Shah lives in Nepalganj after being displaced in the conflict. I still remember what she told me in 2006 about the death of her husband at the hands of the Maoists.

"My husband was cut down right in front of me and I could not even give him water as he lay writhing in pain, with blood all over him. How can I live around the same place, which reminds me over and over again of the terrible incident? I would rather die here."

Another woman I met was Rachana Adhikari of Chitwan whose husband, Tikaram Adhikari owned a poultry business. On May 14, 2005, he was taken away by the security forces for interrogation. He was never seen alive again. His body was buried in Pakhribas. Before his death, a photograph was taken of him wearing Maoist combat clothes and brandishing a gun.

Adhikari's body was later exhumed with the support of villagers. A mother of three, Rachana questioned me with tears in her eyes, "Can you imagine the sight of your loved one being dug out of a hole? I had to face just that."

"Please take my husband's photograph"

The situation of the families of the disappeared is much worse.

The night I met Jamuna, wife of Pushpa Bhandari a district level Maoist labour leader, I could not sleep well.

On November 18, 2004, Pushpa disappeared from a house in Dharan where he had been taking shelter. Following his disappearance, it became extremely difficult for Jamuna to feed and educate her children. She lives in a small hut and works as a labourer in a biscuit factory. For three years, Jamuna has been counting the days for her husband's return; but without hope.

Till the Maoists were underground, Jamuna had some hope of her husband's well-being. Following the Maoist participation in the government, however, she has lost all hope. For, there is still no sign of her husband.



Babita Basnet (centre) with participants at WISCOMP's Symposium on *Dialogic Explorations: Texts and Contexts*

Another painful factor is that her once studious 13-year-old son has fallen into the drug habit. As I started to leave, Jamuna said, "You are a journalist. You attend many events. Please take my husband's photograph. Maybe you will see him somewhere." How long, I wondered, would she be able to live this life?

While researching towards my WISCOMP *Scholar of Peace* Fellowship project, I met many more men and women with similar problems. What all of them have in common is their mental agony. Mostly, it is the women who face mental anguish. The male members of the

house enjoy some distractions – be it going to the market or attending local functions – that make it easier for them to forget their worries. The women, on the other hand, stay at home and are unable to share their pain.

Women & the April Movement

The people's movement of 2006 brought about unexpected changes in Nepal. The April movement, which started with demands for the reinstatement of the Parliament and the establishment of democracy, achieved more than desired in just 19 days. It saw the involvement of respected personalities, students, labourers, employees and, even homemakers.

Women-led rallies were taken out in various districts across Nepal. Among them, the women's rally in Myagdi District and those taken out by the wives of security forces in Chitwan are worth mentioning. Saraswati Poudyal of Chitwan (whose husband was killed in the Maoist conflict) led a rally comprising families of both police and army officers. Saraswati's husband Inspector Govinda Poudyal was killed on February 1, 2001, in a Maoist ambush while escorting the then DIG Kumar Koirala and Basu Dev Oli from Tanahun to Pokhara.

The families gave a call for democracy and against monarchy. Their slogan was "*Police army daju bhai sahayog gara hamilai*" ("Police and army are brothers; we need support"). Such active involvement from the families of the security forces is significant.

During the people's movement, twenty-one people were killed and approximately seven thousand injured. Two women – Situ Bishwokarma and Tulsi Chettri – were among those killed. Situ Bishwokarma was shot dead in Gyanendra Chowk, Nepalganj. Tulsi Chettri of Chitwan was shot in her own home while she was arranging drinking water for the protesters in the streets. Tulsi's husband, Krishna Bahadur Dumrakoti was working abroad when she died. A month after his wife's martyrdom, he married again. When, shortly afterwards, Krishna Bahadur attended a memorial for the martyrs as a guest of honour, some women in the audience forced him to leave.

Among those injured, Bishnu Lal Maharjan and 17-year-old Mukesh Kayastha remain in coma.

A new Nepal

All the political parties, except the Maoists, welcomed the declaration by King Gyanendra on April 24, 2006 reinstating the Parliament dissolved in October 2004. While the Maoists wanted to continue the people's movement, the seven reinstated parties did not agree. As a result, the movement came to a halt.

Until the Eight-point Agreement between the Maoists and the seven parties was finalised, the Maoists had claimed from time to time that the movement was a success due to them. On the other hand, the seven parties did not feel the need to mention the Maoists while talking about the success of the movement.

Following the King's declaration, a code of conduct was developed. The Maoist army was confined to the cantonments; the Interim Constitution was developed; and, the Interim Parliament was constituted. Soon after, the Interim Government was put in place.

Inclusive democracy?

A positive aspect of the ten-year people's war was the issue of inclusiveness. Issues related to women, Dalits, indigenous groups and the Madhesi were raised very strongly during this period.

After the restoration of democracy, the need for state restructuring has come up particularly strongly. Although the Parliament has declared 33 per cent reservation for women in all structures of the state, this has not been included in the Interim Constitution. The Maoists now have 43 per cent women in the Parliament, but other parties did not follow suit. The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) [UML] and the Maoists have one female minister each in the Interim government: Hisila Yami of the Maoists is the Minister for Housing and Physical Planning and Sahana Pradhan of the UML is the Minister for Foreign Affairs. But, the number of women in various committees related to the peace process is limited.

Agonising predicaments

The Interim Parliament has witnessed a situation wherein some members have had to sit alongside others responsible for the death of their loved ones. Many people have termed this development "interesting"; but, from the perspective of the women involved, it is agonising.

UML Parliamentarians Tirtha Gautam, Parbati Choudhary, Shanti Pakhrin and Kashi Poudyal have all lost their husbands in the conflict. It is said that Shanti Pakhrin's husband, Buddhiman Pakhrin was killed by Devi Khadaka, a Maoist Parliamentarian. Devi has said that this was a matter between the Maoists and the UML; not between herself and Shanti Pakhrin.

There are also homemakers-turned-Parliamentarians such as Paro Devi Yadav, Shanti Pakhrin, Kashi Poudyal and Tirtha Gautam, who inherited the mantle from their politically active husbands killed by the Maoists during the conflict.

The Maoists have selected 30 Parliamentarians from among its female cadre who had previously been living underground and two from civil society. Most of the female Maoist Parliamentarians have lost their husbands or family members in the war.

However, there seems to be little change in the lives of women in the families of slain security forces. Some army and police widows have received training in tailoring and sewing machines through army and police wives associations. Several others have not received anything at all.

"Real" peace?

In my opinion, the meaning of "real" peace is the inclusion of all sectors in addressing people's problems. This alone will ensure a sustainable, effective and long-term peace in the nation.

This is not easy. Previously, it was believed that things would be smooth when the warring Maoists entered the mainstream. Yet, new problems, such as the Madhesi demand and Terai disturbances have arisen now. Despite these issues, it must be remembered that this is the first time anywhere in the world that Maoists have entered mainstream politics. This must be viewed as a positive development. Yet it is too early to form a final conclusion.

~

Babita Basnet is currently the Editor of the popular Nepali weekly, *Ghatana Ra Bichar* in Kathmandu, Nepal.





THOSE BORDERS IN MY MIND

SHREYA JANI

I hate Pakistan.
I hate Pakistan!
I hate Pakistan?

I accept Pakistan?
I accept Pakistan!
I accept Pakistan.

Pakistan is?
Pakistan is!
Pakistan is.

I am an Indian.
I do not hate Pakistan.
Pakistan is.
It is my neighbour and its people struggle with the same questions of peace, development and daily living as I do.

This is the story of my journey to peace, reconciliation and transformation, with many milestones crossed and many more to come. It is hard to remember exactly when hatred became acceptance and acceptance, celebration. However, some incidents remain in my memory as testimony to this journey.

That mysterious neighbour

As a child, I remember waiting for the Republic Day parade on January 26 with great excitement. I used to be thrilled watching smartly dressed military and police forces march from India Gate to Red Fort. Then, there was the display of the weapons in our arsenal and the MiG-17 aircrafts that performed acrobatics in the air. Looking at those powerful weapons and smart people, I often wanted to join the army and become a secret commando who would fight "the enemy".

"The enemy" was the mysterious neighbour on the other side that hated us, rejected us and constantly conspired to harm us. We were secular; they were not. We were democratic while they always seemed to be struggling with their democracy. We were multicultural while they were a monolith. Hence, the assumption that we were better. And that they were evil, responsible for the partition and a reminder of the colonial legacy of the two-nations theory.

These strong images were reinforced socially by Bollywood movies of patriotism, newspaper reportage on the Kashmir imbroglio, history classes on Indian

independence and stories of those who lost everything during the partition narrated by grandmothers, uncles, aunts and acquaintances who had lived the horror.

My throat used to swell up while watching the television serial, *Param Veer Chakra* that told stories of fearless army officers fighting for mother India and saving us from the *dushman* on the other side. The American poet E.E Cummings once wrote, "Hate bounces". I hated Pakistan.

I remember history lessons on the Indus Valley



Shreya Jani (extreme left) at an *Education for Peace* Workshop organised by WISCOMP

civilization in the sixth grade. I had wanted to go see these sites for myself only to realise that they were on the other side of the border. I remember watching Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* in high school. One of the last scenes in the film is that of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and Gandhi at the last Indian National Congress session before the partition. Gandhi and Gaffar Khan hold each other and cry. I remember crying too and wanting to know more about "this" Gaffar Khan. I looked around for information and found some. Well, not as much as I found on Jawaharlal Nehru, Lokmanya Tilak or Maulana Abul Kalam Azad at any rate. I felt frustrated. I became curious about "the enemy": wanting to know more and trying to understand my hate for the unknown.

The land of the enemy

My curiosity found the wings to fly when I was 16 years old. It was 1997 and my school decided to send twenty students to Pakistan to celebrate 50 years of independence from colonial rule. Soon, I was off on a two-week adventure through Lahore, Panja Sahib and

Islamabad. This was an eye opener in my journey towards reconciliation, acceptance and understanding. Towards questioning popular stereotypes.

I finally got to see the excavation of the Indus valley civilization, Taxila, the fort of Akbar and the hand print of Guru Nanak on the rock at the Gurudwara of Panja Sahib. And, I ate the world's best kebabs and chocolate cake in Lahore.

The man who sold *shararas*

However, the story most vivid in my memory took place in Lahore's Anarkali Bazaar.

Walking around this colourful market place, I saw an old man selling beautiful *shararas*. He stopped me and asked whether I was one of the Indian students he had heard about. When I responded with a *yes*, a distant look clouded the man's face; but there was a smile in his eyes. He then told me that he had crossed over from India to Pakistan during the partition and that he still had family back in India. Therefore, he added, he was very happy to meet me. He wanted me to meet his grand daughter, who was about the same age as me. Then, he held me and started to cry.

Why was this grown man crying? I did not understand it! Our bus was leaving and I had return to the group. I panicked and made my apologies to the old man. I promised to return soon to meet him and his grand daughter and ran.

I did not go back to meet the man. I honestly do not know what confusion made me run. I am glad to have met the old man; yet, am regretful that I never went to meet his grand daughter. I had accepted Pakistan, but had not yet made the attempt to understand and embrace its people.

Peers from enemy territory

What followed next was vigorous questioning and seeking.

As a student of Political Science at Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, I spent three years challenging my national identity and understanding the meanings and premises of notions such as nation-states, sovereignty, autonomy and citizenship. I participated in rallies against the nuclearisation of India, protested the Kargil war and was deemed "anti-national" by many of my peers for doing so.

Pakistan remained the launch pad of questions that challenged my long-held beliefs in peace, dialogue and transformation. *Did I have it in me to go beyond acceptance towards empathy and collaboration in the future?*

In Buddhism, it is believed that the teacher appears when the time is right. In the fall of 2001, I was given a chance to face my past, brave my stereotypes and foster empathy and understanding. I was invited to participate in WISCOMP's First Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop: *Rehumanising the Other*. It was, perhaps, the first attempt to bring together university students from India and Pakistan for training in conflict transformation. Here, uncomfortable questions were asked and vulnerabilities exposed. Here reflected hope that a new generation was ready to move on, embrace each other and create spaces for true dialogue.

The teacher of new histories

I carried with me the insights gained and techniques learnt at this Workshop to both my teacher training and my tenure as a middle-school history teacher (which began in the fall of 2005).

My seventh-standard students in Varanasi's Rajghat School supported me in the challenge as we sat down to examine the two statements thrown at me during the 2001 Workshop: *I am an Indian. I hate Pakistan.*

Our explorations into these two statements led us to the understanding that the problem lay not with people, but in structures. The honesty of the children in examining the sentences, which even adults and scholars shy away from, gave me hope that peace between the two nations was possible.

A student of peace

Accepting, understanding and empathising with Pakistan and forging friendships with its people have taught me a lot. Mostly, it has helped me challenge the notions one acquires without much exploration and thought; recognise the stereotypes that govern our lives; and, realise the need for critical thinking.

These friendships are largely responsible for my interest in educating for peace. Presently, as I complete my Master's in Peace Education in Costa Rica, I remember people's reactions to this subject in the past. I have been

THOSE BORDERS IN MY MIND

met with smirks, sarcastic comments and puzzled expressions. Some dismissed peace education as a "soft" topic that only the rich have the privilege to engage in, while others just did not understand the content of the subject and its practical importance, especially for Asia, which has so many "real" problems to grapple with. Mostly, people dismissed it as a "fashionable" thing to do. When met with such reactions, I am amazed at the cynicism of people. I cannot understand how creating unequal paradigms can be more respectable than building paths for society to move from a culture of violence towards a culture of peace!

I am thankful for my relationship with Pakistan and for the time spent at WISCOMP's Conflict Transformation Workshop which helped me realise the importance of peace education. As Gandhi rightly said: "There is no

way to peace, for peace is the way." My relationship with Pakistan has helped me understand the meaning of this statement. *Shukriya* to all the people from both sides of the border who gave me the courage to face hatred and work towards transforming it into love.

~

Shreya Jani recently completed her Master's in Peace Education from the University for Peace, Costa Rica. She now lives in New Delhi and works in the area of Education for Peace.



JISNE LAHORE NAHI DEKHA

SIDDHARTHA DAVE



I thought the land on "the other side" would be purple or blue, their grass, white or red and their water, green in colour!

Little did I realise then, that people – irrespective of culture, geographical locale and food habits – are the same: homo sapiens. Never before in life was I so at ease. I least expected to feel so in Pakistan! The cartographic lines artificially drawn across the earth seemed no more than mere shadow lines.

Skepticism proved wrong

When I landed in Lahore in the wee hours of March 21, 2004, I was an extraterrestrial in Pakistan. Was Lahore the sacred place of the Vedas and of my ancestors? Or was it the land of enemies? I pondered. Whatever it was, I had to unscramble it. For, I felt that my generation should not surrender to the conditioning and stereotyping, to the blurred images, largely creations of the media and the establishment.

It was with fear in my mind and skepticism in my heart that I had set sail to Pakistan. However, I was proved wrong from the very first ball of the innings.

I enjoyed the entertainment provided by the *rickshawala* enroute to Hotel Philati as he hummed songs of Mukesh and Rafi. Soon, I learnt that Lahoris are great eaters. They would spend Rs. 1.50 on food even when they earned only Rs. 1.00! Anarkali Bazaar, Gwalmandi and Food Street are places that aggravate the taste buds. A vegetarian, I would have faced troubles in any other part of the world, but not in Pakistan, the land of my brethren! I was served *chole puris* and *dal pulav*, whose taste was the same as home. The *rasmalai* and *gulab jamuns* were just as sweet, contrary to what we are indoctrinated to think.

Celebrating Indian victory

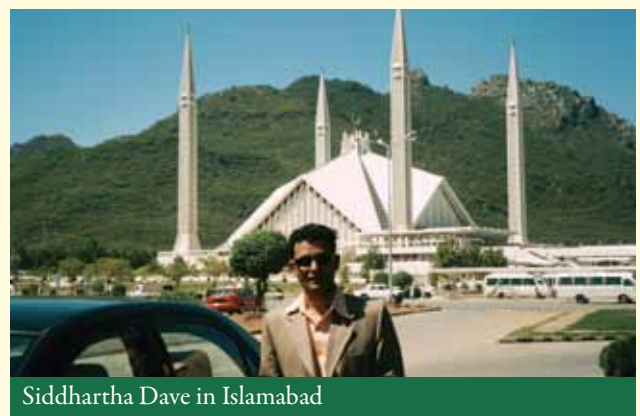
On March 24, 2004, India won the fifth and final One Day International cricket match of the India Vs Pakistan 2004 Series in Lahore and lifted the trophy. To celebrate this victory, the students of the National College of Arts, Lahore treated me. "*Chaliyee, Hindustan ki jeet ka jashn ham sab milke manate hai,*" said my new friends, who just a few hours ago were strangers to me. We celebrated with *aloo ke paranthe*.

That night, I drove through the streets of Lahore with Malick and his friends, the Indian tricolour fluttering atop the car. At that moment, this Islamic country under a "non-democratic" government appeared to be more tolerant and egalitarian than our own "secular, democratic" one.

Of names & identities

I assumed that the "re-naming game" was common to the subcontinent. Nevertheless, I was proved wrong. Though colonial names such as Canning Garden and Edwin Road had been renamed Jinnah Baug and Iqbal Road respectively, many roads and buildings bearing Hindu nomenclature remained unchanged. Lakshmi Chowk was called by the same name. So too were Ram Baug and Jain Mandir Marg. Sir Ganga Ram Hospital still bears its name. Temple Road had not been renamed Masjid Road. Some old houses still bore plaques with Hindu names or slogans such as Jai Sia Ram, which reflected the identity of its original inhabitants.

Caste, however, remains a reality in Pakistani society. I met Ranas, Chaudharys and Mallicks. On being asked about my caste, I admitted, "Well, I am a Brahmin." To this, I received the response, "Then, you are in your land! *Lahore to Vedoan ki bhumi hai*" ("Lahore is the land of the Vedas"). It is inscribed on Lahore Fort that the city owes its name to Lahu (Luv), the son of Sri Ram, who had established this city. Kasuri, the satellite town of Lahore is named for Kush, the twin brother of Lahu."



Siddhartha Dave in Islamabad

Rediscovering oneself

The trip to Lahore in March 2004 opened the floodgates. What followed were a flurry of emotions and the breaking of stereotypes. What followed was also an

understanding and discovery of India. Yes, the more I interacted with Punjabis from Pakistan, the more I understood the north Indian psyche. From then on, I have been regularly meeting and interacting with friends across the Radcliff. Have regularly been discovering and re-discovering "Indian-ness".

More encounters

I could have never imagined that Pakistanis would be the ones to come to my rescue in foreign lands. While in Hong Kong in 2006, I missed a flight and had to return back to my host's house. Only, the door was locked! Sensing my difficulty, a man – who I later discovered was a Pathan from Pakistan – came forward to help me. Similarly, when I was trying to find my way through Kuala Lumpur, I was helped by a man of my father's age from Karachi. As the stranger's face fading into a crowded bus, his hands waving at me for luck and blessing, I had tears in my eyes.

Over the years, I have developed some wonderful relationships with people across the border. I share a bond with the many Imrans, Nadeems, Sairas and Khalidas from Pakistan that I have met in various places across the world at different points in time.

Of the dozen-odd countries I have visited, none has been as satisfying and emotive as Pakistan. Despite the line drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliffe some six decades ago, hearts remain bonded together. Till date.

~

Siddhartha Dave is a peace activist, currently with the Fredskorpsets' (Norwegian Peace Corps) Programme through the Foundation for Human Rights & Democracy, FORUM-ASIA, Bangkok.



HAVE YOU RECEIVED OUR VISA APPLICATION, SIR?



MARIA GULRAIZE KHAN

'Hello?'

'Hello. Can I speak to the Secretary, Ministry of Interior?'

'No, what do you want, this is his P.A.'

'Assalam-o-alaikum sir, I'm calling from Kinnaird College. We have sent you a visa application for an Indian delegation that is to visit Lahore... have you received the application?'

'No.'

Click... the mono-tone bleak ring of rejection leaves me stumped. I stood there two minutes blinking at Mrs Phailbus's secretary. I pressed the redial button.

'Hello. Sir I am calling on behalf of the Principal of KC, Mrs Phailbus.'

'OOhh Mrs Phailbus, please give her my regards. She is a great woman! Please give my many salaams.' gushed the P.A. to the Secretary, Ministry of Interior.

'Sir about the application...'

'Fax the cover letter and passport details again.'

Click.....the dial tone eats up the sentence.

~

I quickly count to a hundred in fives and tens and start my search for Sausan and Nargis. I rushed to the living room and caught Nargis hiding behind the gathers of her mother's saree who was sipping away tea with my mom. This game of hide and seek was endless. I just kept bumping into Nargis again and again (*I think*). Sausan and Nargis were identical twins. Clad in identical clothing they were always hard to tell apart. They were our next door neighbours in Riyadh. They were my best friends. They were Indians. It's funny how we can always be such good friends and coexist on foreign soil rather than our own.

~

An hour later

'Hello. Is this the P.A. to the Secretary, Ministry of Interior?'

'Yes.'

'Assalam-o-alaikum sir, I'm calling from Kinnaird College. Sir have you received the application as yet?'

'We have forwarded it to desk India-I where your case will be investigated. I'll check with the man at India-I. Let me talk to him myself. You don't want to annoy him, otherwise...'

Click....the dial tone ring leaves me feeling helpless.

~

Growing up as teens in Lahore in the 90s was mind-boggling. Propaganda on state television channels

hardened people against the common enemy. The closest one could get to India was putting your foot under the barbed wire at the Wagah border. India-Pakistan cricket matches were like war. We had to make sure Nana Abu (maternal grandfather), a veteran of the Pakistani army, now faint-hearted in his late 80s did not watch TV that day. A senseless and crazy game of who blasts the most bombs ensued. Despite the image of the demon that dwelled next door, the soundtrack to all wedding videos included the latest Bollywood songs. Everyone would sit glued to the television watching the latest pirated video cassette of Bollywood movies. School trips and family vacations included driving up north to the hills singing to memorable Indian songs of the 50s and 60s on the way.

~

A day later:

'Hello is this the India desk?'

'The officer in-charge has gone for Friday prayers.'

'Will he be back after the prayer break?'

'Mushkil hai.'

Click...the dial tone seemed to mock me now.

~



Collaborating towards peaceful coexistence in the future: Maria (seated, front row) with participants of the 2005 Conflict Transformation Workshop, at Fatehpur Sikri, Agra

My first trip to India ever was to attend a WISCOMP workshop in 2004. I went to Delhi with doubts and scepticism, mostly because we were told by senior faculty and family to be on our guard and to watch out for 'underlying agendas' – a typical stereotype of Indians. As soon as we stepped on Indian soil, my mind automatically began to make comparisons between home and Delhi. Janpath was just like Liberty Market. Lodhi Road was just like Lahore's Mall road. I was surprised

HAVE YOU RECEIVED OUR VISA APPLICATION, SIR?

how the vendors at Delhi Haat could distinguish us from Indians because I surely couldn't. Just like one of my eldest phupho (paternal aunt) describes the ordeals they went through at Partition while moving from Jammu, the same were the tears that appeared in an elderly lady's eyes in Delhi as she described how she and several Hindu families had to leave their homes in Model Town, Lahore.

It was like finding a second home in Delhi as the warmth, hospitality, and respect given by WISCOMP and all the Indian friends I interacted with during the workshop dissipated the stronghold of the beliefs that had been built over the years and that I came to Delhi with.

~

After the week-end and several calls:

'Hello is this the India desk? Sir, I'm calling from Kinnaird College. We have sent you a visa application for an Indian delegation that is to visit Lahore... have you received the application?'

And what followed could only further demolish the slightest bit of hope that things would work out.

'Yes, I did! Why can't your college follow proper procedures! First I am pressurised by the Secretary, then I had people from the Foreign Ministry call! Don't you know, you are supposed to get clearance from the Federal Ministry of Education first!'

Click. The dial tone made me want to pull my hair (of what was left) out.

~

In a completely commercialized and self-centric world based on double standards, it's very rare to find people today who you could look up to and admire for their vision, ideals and integrity, somebody who is at peace with themselves and willing to share their wisdom with the world. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have met somebody as inspiring as Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath. In complete awe of her graceful demeanour, there's not a single point where one didn't learn something from her. To find people who were genuinely devoted to a purpose like Stuti and Manjri, friends from WISCOMP, brought about the realization how limited and negative my own vision was. There was so much to learn from my Indian friends, about democracy (about not wasting our right to vote), positivity (the need to transform within), how active, professional and aware India's youth are, and the dire need for people in Pakistan to be more open and progressive towards change for conflict transformation.

~

A few days later after a call to the P.A. to the Secretary to the Federal Minister of Education:

'Assalam-o-alaikum sir, I'm so sorry for pestering you like this by calling you repeatedly. You must recognize my voice by now.'

'Oh yes *beta*! How are you?'

'Ummmm....fine.'

'Beta the job is yours! You can start working here from tomorrow.'

'Sir, I think you have the wrong person.'

An uncomfortable silence followed by the phone being slammed.

~

This essay was a greatly abridged account of what it was like trying to arrange visas for the WISCOMP-Kinnaird Alumni Convention that was to take place in February 2007 in Lahore. Despite being somewhat cursed in holding the event which keeps being postponed, bomb blasts and terrorists, the brawls for accommodation at Lahore Gymkhana, shortage of airline seats and no visas, we at Kinnaird (as stubborn as our bureaucrats) have not lost hope.

Every time we've been in Delhi, we've always appreciated the work WISCOMP has done in bringing all of us together... but for the first time, most of us, particularly at Kinnaird, realized exactly how much painstaking effort and time is put in by the WISCOMP team which organizes the annual workshop to perfection every year. While we're busy in dialogue, sight-seeing in between, and mostly making new friends in India, the entire process involved in creating and organizing a forum to bring Pakistanis and Indians together is completely taken for granted. I pray the WISCOMP network continuous to grow, we find lasting peace, and that one day nobody has to go insane while trying to visit friends across the border.

~

Maria Gulraize Khan was formerly a Lecturer at the Mass Communication Department, Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, and is currently doing independent research.



ETCHINGS ON A WAVE

MEENAKSHI GOPINATH



Kahlil Gibran reminds us that "in the true world of the spirit, there are only encounters, never partings or goodbyes". This resonates especially for the growing community of peacebuilders in a region like South Asia that has, from the beginning of the 20th century, witnessed several "partitions" and severances.

The partition of 1947 that resulted in the creation of Pakistan has dominated the collective psyche of the region since then. It still conjures up images of worlds gained and worlds lost.

A curious enchantment

For me, Pakistan has been an object of fascination since childhood. I shared in the excitement of the arrivals and departures from "across the border" of sundry aunts and uncles of my playmates Chandbibi and Sabiha, and soaked in the somewhat "Orientalist" associations of musk, gossamer and sequins. For many of us, of the post-partition generation and growing up in the 50s and 60s, the perceptions of the identity of the Indian Muslim, became eluctably entwined with Pakistan as much as with images from popular Hindi cinema. Subsequent spectator euphoria / hysteria during Indo-Pakistan



Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Honorary Director, WISCOMP interacting with participants at the First Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Rehumanising the Other*, 2001

cricket matches reinforced this stereotype. Though Pakistan remained for many a lost frontier, for me there were no terms of estrangement, only a curious enchantment, with a horizon to be explored anew. I was to learn much later about how important the public acknowledgement and acceptance of the existence and identity of Pakistan by Indians was to the process of building trust between two estranged neighbours.

A larger family

Fast forward, to a decade later. My real first hand engagement with Pakistan began in a distant place, at a destined time. At Graduate School in the United States, and in Prof. Anwar Syed, a Pakistan-born American, my academic advisor, I found a mentor who became an abiding influence in nudging me towards transcending the notion of "the other" in the context of the India-Pakistan conundrum. We then dissolved borders and redrew boundaries. As my circle of friends and acquaintances from Pakistan grew, I learnt from them how building trust was like watching a bud bloom and being bathed in its fragrance, again and again. Evening soirees with old Indian melodies wafting through shared plates of *Kebabs* and bonhomie are etched as early memories of bonding and conviviality on foreign shores in a third country.

As Prof. Syed navigated me towards an understanding of Pakistani politics and culture and I embarked on my dissertation, I learnt afresh from this remarkable man, the meanings of trust, of inclusivity, of friendship and notions of community that transcend geographical barriers. For me a new journey with a larger family had begun. The sense of *deja vu* pervading my subsequent visits to Lahore resonated with Eliot's refrain that time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future and time future contained in time past.



Prof. Anwar Syed

Forward to the early 1990s. For what seemed to me to be fortuitous coincidence (but of which Anwar Syed had an uncanny prescience), I was invited to join the Indo-Pakistan Neemrana initiative, which is the longest standing track-two process between the two countries. This was the time when civil society interaction was almost totally absent. Consequently, each member of the initiative was deeply conscious, that somehow we were contributing to a process which had to be larger than the sum of its parts. For me personally, Neemrana provided an invaluable context to deepen and broaden the "rehumanisation" process as I grappled with the several tangible and intangible contours of genuine "dialogue".

I learnt that what often passes off as communication is a deft obfuscation, and that this can in the long run be an impediment to durable peace and building trust.

Unlocking potentialities

Often the tension between fidelity to one's community / national identity and transparent and genuine dialogue requires many many conversations with oneself, so as to develop the courage to be authentic, to cultivate abundance and engage with possibilities hitherto unexplored. These dilemmas and contradictions challenged me and I yearned for a context, free of conventional constraints, jingoistic compulsions and narrow nationalist agendas to unscramble possibilities and unlock potentialities that I knew intuitively were waiting to be tapped.

When WISCOMP came into being in 1999, it gave utterance to the search to expand horizons of engagement transcending barriers of reified identities. Over the past few years, during the several visits to Pakistan and meetings with journalists, academics, students, civil society actors, diplomats, government officials and women's groups, I see in young Pakistanis a desire to shed the baggage of the past and move to exploring a shared future with Indians, in larger South Asian fora.

The joy of building bridges

The joy and excitement of the journey of building bridges is incomparable and unique. It is made even richer by the growing numbers of Pakistanis and Indians who invest their time, trust and expertise in the WISCOMP initiative, who dialogue as candidly about Kashmir as they envision a world without WMDs. For me in some ways, the wheel has come full circle – in the many young Pakistani participants at WISCOMP's Symposia and Conflict Transformation Workshops, who tell us about their decision to make peacebuilding a part of their personal journey of discovery and growth.

Each time I am asked to be a referee for a young Pakistani applicant for a placement, at a University or Corporation in various parts of the globe, I am filled with gratitude for the trust that is thus bequeathed and I invoke a great teacher, who set me on this journey. To link with the source is always a profound and moving experience, it is both humbling and uplifting in a curious kind of way to experience again and again, the space where dreams were at work and a vision unfolded.

In many senses, the engagement with building bridges is for many of us metaphorically the axis of our world, a sacred space, a place for all seasons – summer, winter and healing rain. It is where roads converge and from where



Participants of the Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop with Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, President of India, in 2003



Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath (seated, third from left) with Indian and Pakistani members of the *Neemrana Track Two Dialogue*

roads branch out. It is a centre that is alive, peopled and busy, not a fixed point at all as philosopher Margaret Chatterjee enunciated several years ago.

A time to dream anew

We are often told that for everything there is a season, a time for every matter under heaven, a time to sow and a time to reap. We are today at a watershed where new vistas beckon, where we may both reap and sow; we are at a time where dreams have been realised, and we need to dream anew, to strive to seek and never to yield. To live continuously in spiritual abundance is to know that no pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars,

or sailed to an uncharted land or opened a new heaven to the human spirit; for, as the American poet Sam Walter Foss (1858-1911) said,

*The woods were made for the hunters of dreams,
The brooks for the fisher of song;
To the hunters who hunt for the gun less game
The streams and the woods belong.*

And for me, again to invoke Eliot, the end of my exploration, will be to arrive where I started and know the place for the first time.

~

Meenakshi Gopinath is the Founder & Honorary Director of WISCOMP. She also serves as Principal, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi. In 2007, she was honoured with the prestigious national award, the Padmashri, for her invaluable contribution to education and literature. The award was recognition of her charismatic, transformational leadership and visionary imagination.





SYNCHRONICITY MANJRIKA SEWAK

Synchronicity – the fortuitous intermeshing of events – is how I would describe a journey I undertook several years ago; a journey that took me to a place called Pakistan.

Reaching out to the other

It all began in 1998 when, as a student at Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, I escorted a group of students and faculty from Kinnaird College, Lahore, to the Taj Mahal. The hesitation and awkwardness of the first few minutes on the bus to Agra soon gave way to passionate conversations on our common interests and aspirations as teenagers and our shared cultural heritage. But what brought us even closer was an admiration of the multiple layers of diversity that lay between us. For instance, even though we spoke Urdu, we had different scripts. At the same time, we acknowledged that our Pakistani friends had to translate for us the sacred verses from the Quran that were inscribed on the Taj Mahal, a reminder of our shared past. Even though a decade has passed since, I still have vivid memories of this first encounter – an encounter which encouraged me to ask my mother about my maternal grandmother’s roots in Pakistan. To my surprise, I discovered that the ties were much closer than I had imagined.

With the curiosity and excitement that this discovery had generated, eight years ago, I embarked on a twelve-hour bus journey with 40 Indian women, representing different faiths, generations and diverse professional backgrounds. The journey took us from New Delhi to Lahore. I was excited! The reasons were both personal and professional. At a personal level, I was hoping I would be able to visit Shekhupura (where my grandmother’s family had roots). At a professional level, the journey marked an important stage of the peace process between the two countries. It was part of a cross-border initiative facilitated by the Women’s Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA) in which WISCOMP was a participant.

The significance of this initiative lay in its timing. It happened at a time of intense hostility between the two countries (following the Kargil conflict) and diplomatic channels of communication had reached an all-time low. In such an environment, women’s groups were among the few actors attempting to reach out to “the other” and create a space for building relationships

across the divisions of conflict. The effort was to address the fear, misperceptions and prejudice that had exacerbated and sustained the hostility between the two countries.

Working for peace

For me, the “women’s bus for peace” initiative was a turning point. It was a personal journey which transformed into a passionate commitment to work professionally in support of the peace process between India and Pakistan. It happened at a time when Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath was in the process of setting up a Conflict Transformation Programme at WISCOMP for youth leaders from Pakistan and India. The one-on-one interaction with strangers who later become close friends influenced my professional commitment to work for peace between the two countries. With each visit to Pakistan and with each conversation with friends who visited Delhi, this conviction became stronger. I began to feel that it was my personal responsibility to engage with those Indians who saw Pakistan as “enemy country” or those who attributed negative characteristics to its culture and its people. I would begin by posing this question to them: “You have strong views on people from the other side of the border. Have you met anyone from Pakistan? Have you visited Pakistan?” The response would inevitably be “No”!

The only solution, in my mind, to this problem of negative stereotyping is face-to-face dialogue, sustained over a period of time. In this context, I have increasingly felt a need to focus on the notion of interdependence of the human community. Any effort at trust-building and conflict resolution must begin with the recognition of



Manjrika Sewak, Senior Programme Officer, WISCOMP and Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Honorary Director, WISCOMP with Kinnaird College faculty and CT Workshop alumni in Lahore

this interconnectedness. This web of relationships – sometimes visible and at other times less so – is the centre that holds us together as human beings. If we Indians and Pakistanis recognize this, we will find peace and coexistence more desirable and realistic.

Learnings from the journey

At a personal level, my journey has been enriched with each visit to Pakistan, as I established contact with long-lost cousins, visited the College where my great-grandmother had studied, and absorbed the culture of the city that was her home. The circle of friends from Pakistan grew till a time came when I discovered that I had more Pakistani friends than I had Indian friends! Whether it has been the experience of Pakistani friends becoming family as I struggled as a student in the United States, or the relatives from across the border who helped me to realise that coexistence and peace are realistic dreams, or the strangers on the streets of Lahore who made me feel at home, the journey has been fascinating.

Among the learnings from this journey, I would like to mention two here: First, separating one's own experience from that of the previous generation is crucial in ending the cycle of fear, mistrust and violence. Second, if you

begin to talk to those perceived as “the other”, if you begin to know them and understand them, you *will* inevitably feel empathy and you *will* humanise them. This, I see as a foundation for any effort that seeks to build sustainable peace in a context of protracted conflict.

These and many other experiences have strengthened my belief that my work at WISCOMP, which deals largely with efforts to facilitate *conflict transformation* between India and Pakistan, is more than a job. I see it is a calling. Someone had once said: “The greatest vocation is that which lies at the intersection of what one has a passion for and what the world really needs.”

~

Manjrika Sewak is Senior Programme Officer, Women in Security, Conflict Management & Peace (WISCOMP), New Delhi, India.





TWO STATES OF HOME

ANUPAMA SEKHAR

June 2002
Amritsar

In one pastless moment, I line my eyes
with the velvet soot of this burning border
that I am certain cannot be seen
from the dark side of the deep grey moon.

The rushing Sutlej dances beside my tired, aching feet.
A hungry nomad soul, I drink all of it.
Palm after colourless palm.

Filled to the brim, yet made empty
by wounds of angry histories,
I fall to my knees. And sleep dreamless,
beside the bare-feet faithfuls,
who walk in holy silence around the still blue lake.

When at last, I open my salt-stained eyes,
I am someplace else
that also smells of the very same rain.

And this is how it came to be
that seeking nightness in Amritsar,
I tasted the dazzle of Lahore's dawn,
and knew no difference
between my two states of home.

December 2007
Chennai

My imagination is my courage, compass and companion.
It is both home and healing.

Beside this ancient tree of desire and goodness sleep all
sacred and secret parts of me. In its velvet lap, I lie
weeping, lie dreaming. Lie conjuring my dark, dazzling
muses: purple cities & rushing rivers; shimmering words
and beloved voices. It is in this holy darkness of my
imagination that the muse of Pakistan resides.

And so, my life becomes dreamless sleep inside a precious
song made by a beloved stranger under some distant
Karachi sky. Becomes the aching wait of a thousand years
beside a weeping Chenab, still mourning Sohni and
Mahiwal. Becomes the music of those beloved

enchanters, Junoon. Becomes Bulleh Shah & Iqbal.
Mothsmoke and maps (both for lost lovers). Becomes
also my fellow nomad souls at WISCOMP. This, then,
is what Pakistan has come to mean to me.

I began the journey down this strange, sweet road on first
hearing the name Mohenjodaro roll out of my teacher's
mouth. All of eleven years old then, I felt pleasantly
ambushed. And was taken down in an instant.
Sleepless with excitement, I dreamt of the glorious
Indus that night.

Back then I did not quite understand what all of this
meant. Only, that these ancient things healed and
nourished me with such beauty as I had not even dared
imagine.

The meaning of it all came to me just some two odd years
ago during a chance reading of Imtiaz Hussain. *Watan*,
Hussain was saying, cannot be merely defined by the
territory within which one claims rightful citizenship;
but by the larger civilisational space from which one
draws imaginative strength. For me, Pakistan has always
been a part of just such a space.

"I still feel," continued Hussain, "that I am an exile who
wanders between Karbala and Ayodhya." I too wander
endlessly. Between Mehrgarh and Mohenjodaro.
But, not in banishment. The feeling, instead, is that of
the comfort, the delight of homecoming.

And this is how it came to be
that seeking nightness in Amritsar,
I tasted the dazzle of Lahore's dawn,
and knew no difference
between my two states of home.

~

Anupama Sekhar is a Fellow of the
Centre for Communication and
Development Studies, Pune, India, and
is developing arts-in-education
programmes for classrooms and
museums, focusing specifically on peace
and cultural literacies.





CT WORKSHOP DIARIES

THIS HOME
REDEFINING PEACE
WILL OUR GENERATION DELIVER PEACE?
WHY I CHOSE THE WORK I DO
INDIA DIARIES
PAKISTAN DIARIES

THIS HOME



DEEPTI MAHAJAN

"When I came to WISCOMP's Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop *Transcending Conflict 2003* as a participant, I came with the hope of bringing new and diverse points of view to bear on my thinking and daily existence.

...Four years hence, I write this... as a member of the WISCOMP team, as someone who has now closely lived the realities of the Conflict Transformation programme: the faith; the challenges; the patient, incremental growth. For me, it has truly been a transformative journey. The theory of conflict transformation has provided me the ground to sow seeds of hope in; an understanding of the practitioner's skills has given me one (if not *the*) answer to the ever so persistent "How?" in the realm of peacebuilding; and most importantly, through the widening circle of engagement and the infectious energy of the alumni group from India and Pakistan, I have learnt the lessons of sustained effort, hope and optimism."

Deepti Mahajan is a Research Associate at The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi, India. She has served as Programme Associate at WISCOMP, New Delhi, India.

EVELYN THORNTON

"Few life experiences have inspired me as deeply as the Conflict Transformation Workshops I helped organise for WISCOMP. As an American, I was inescapably an outsider, but being thus, I was uniquely observer *and* participant.

Walking across the infamous Wagah border between India and Pakistan, passing through immense barbed wire fences, a kilometre-wide no-man zone and six passport checks, I had already observed the physical hostility separating these two nations. In our Workshops, however, the animosity and suspicion that may have once divided the participants – people otherwise conditioned to hate one another – visibly melted away.

...From these Workshops, I gained a strong sense of the possible – that even the most intractable conflicts can be transformed positively. With strong leadership and a desire for change, people can (and do) come together from different sides of a conflict, engage in honest

dialogue and move to a new space of trust and shared understanding. From my position 'in between', I saw a need for interpreters – diplomats, people who can move between various spheres and realities (cultural, geographic, class) to enable broader, more accepting and nuanced understandings of each other and our world."

Evelyn Thornton is currently an Advocacy and Partnership Specialist for The Initiative for Inclusive Security, a programme of Hunt Alternatives Fund, Washington D.C., USA. Evelyn has served as Programme Associate for the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (FUR) in New Delhi, India, where she worked closely with WISCOMP.

ASIFA HASAN

"The first step towards any peace process is questioning one's own perceptions and beliefs; and that is exactly what happens when you put Indians and Pakistanis from diverse backgrounds together in a room. You give them the chance to question their own perceptions, harboured for generations.

Questioning one's own perceptions marks the primary step in conflict resolution, since it evinces the desire of the opponents to engage in dialogue. Such power has been in the hands of the politicians until now; but with initiatives such as WISCOMP, society has been brought in. This is exactly what we need at this stage to break free of the biases of our forefathers, to question our own beliefs and to form our own opinions. This exercise will set us free and usher us into an era where Indian and Pakistani people – not politicians and generals – will sit down to sort out the issues."

Asifa Hasan is currently a Research Fellow with the Mahbub ul-Haq Human Development Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

NAUSHEEN WASI

"My experience at the Conflict Transformation Workshop helped me realise just how vital it was to understand the positions and perspectives, the stakes and sufferings of the so-called "other" even before understanding one's own. For, such understanding helps move the conflicting parties towards a solution of the issue."

Nausheen Wasi is a Lecturer at the Department of

THIS HOME...

AMBEREEN SHAH

"Meeting participants from across South Asia was the most valuable experience of the WISCOMP Workshop process; interacting with them, discussing issues and sharing personal experiences *did* make a difference."

Ambereen Shah is a Communications Consultant with UNESCO, New Delhi, India. She is also a Doctoral Researcher at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

KHADIJA AMJAD

"The most palpable change that came about in the years that followed my participation in WISCOMP's Conflict Transformation Workshop was my perception of India. The country was no longer a monolithic entity swirling in anti-Pakistan sentiment and Bharatiya Janata Party rhetoric. Now, it was also about the Indian friends I had come to cherish and the personal experiences that had – slowly, but surely – allowed me to create my own reality."

Khadija Amjad is presently a Research Assistant at Harvard Law School (USA).

SAROJINI RAO

"Interacting with the other participants and various resource persons taught me that peacebuilders come from all walks of life. There is no single way to be a peacebuilder; there is no set qualification, formula or role. At the same time, the job is not easy. It involves thinking critically, but acting with conviction. It requires much learning, some unlearning and questioning as well. Above all, it demands the kind of wisdom and dedication that is always worth aspiring to, but often difficult to achieve."

Sarojini Rao is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Economics at Carleton College, Minnesota, USA.

FAROOQ AHMAD DAR

"My most valuable learning from the Conflict Transformation Workshop experience is the inspiration I derived from the WISCOMP team. Their commitment to their mission made me realise the need to fight with conviction against all the odds even if there is the slightest ray of hope. Now, I have faith that a group of people does exist which genuinely wants peace in the region; that if I do something in the direction of peace, I will not be all alone."

Farooq Ahmad Dar is a Lecturer in the Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

JYOTIRMOY CHAUDHURI

"Among my most powerful remembrances of the 2001 Workshop are those of the people involved in the process. I felt elated sitting among my peers with their strong sense of purpose and all *that* energy! There, at the Workshop, we were being told that we had the rights *and* the wherewithal to change the direction of the strained relationship with our neighbours, the Pakistanis."

Jyotirmoy Chaudhuri is currently associated with the Society for Aerospace Studies, New Delhi, India.

ANISHA KINRA & SEEMA SRIDHAR

"We finally understood what our favourite musical icon meant when he sang *Imagine*. The Conflict Transformation Workshop indeed helped us create that world in our minds. It has set us on a quest to discover peace within and without and to redefine it as a state of mind rather than the state of affairs, for it is only the former which enables the latter."

The greatest challenge in this journey will be sustaining the enthusiasm, commitment and sense of purpose beyond the safe spaces that WISCOMP accorded us. There will be moments when we will want to walk away, let go, give up. What alone will sustain us in this journey is the vision of a future beyond violence, beyond boundaries."

Anisha Kinra teaches Political Science at a community college in Gainesville, Florida, USA.

Seema Sridhar is a Doctoral Scholar at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

SMRITI VIJ

"I realised that there is no greater contentment than the experience of a personal transformation towards peace. For me, this transformation mostly took place through the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop experiences."

Smriti Vij is presently based in Mumbai, India, where she is looking to develop an independent career in scriptwriting and film-making.

B. RAJESHWARI

"What the Conflict Transformation Workshops have taught me are these: the need to carve a niche for one's self and the ability to transform a hostile environment

into one where the self's individuality is not compromised. The different stories of peace initiatives that women shared at the Workshop have enabled me to think and work positively in situations of conflict."

Rajeshwari is a Doctoral Scholar at the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

MUNA BAIG

"I had enjoyed my WISCOMP experiences immensely but I had not expected to be this influenced at an academic or professional level. I had always been interested in issues of peace and conflict, and was actively involved in membership groups such as Amnesty International and Oxfam. I think the Conflict Transformation Workshop inspired me to focus more on these interests.

...The result was that – somewhere along the way – I realised that my real calling was in the humanitarian

sector. My exposure to human rights law at the London School of Economics and to international humanitarian law at the University of Oxford helped consolidate my thoughts. I decided to delve deeper into these issues using a legal lens. I am currently working to qualify as a lawyer, and aim to develop a practice focusing on human rights and conflict issues. I do believe that my WISCOMP experiences were instrumental in helping me go beyond the typical veneer of altruism and discover within me a lifelong commitment to conflict transformation."

Muna Baig is currently training as a Solicitor in London, UK.

~

This home, the title of the CT Workshop Diaries is a phrase borrowed from alumna Maria Effendi's personal narrative. In *No Longer Anonymous*, Maria writes of WISCOMP: "This home is an open platform where we can speak our minds and hearts without restrictions. We study, learn and enjoy together here."

Snapshots from the Conflict Transformation Workshops



Rehumanising the Other, 2001



Transcending Conflict, 2003



Dialogic Engagement, 2004



Envisioning Futures, 2005



Collaborative Explorations, 2006



Coexistence and Trust-building, 2007



REDEFINING PEACE

AMBEREEN SHAH

"Peace is freedom and leading a life without fear; it is having the space to express oneself; it is not getting violated or violating others."

Ambereen Shah is a Communications Consultant with UNESCO, New Delhi, India. She is also a Doctoral Researcher at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

FAROOQ AHMAD DAR

"Peace is living in an environment where you have the right to your own opinion and the duty to tolerate another's, even if you do not accept it."

Farooq Ahmad Dar is a Lecturer in the Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

UMAIRA AMIR-UD-DIN

"Peace is positivity in the understanding of real life situations; it is respect for the negative and the ability to keep the doors open for opportunities."

Umaira Amir-ud-Din is currently associated with Maryna Pakistan Pvt. Ltd., Lahore, Pakistan.

SAROJINI RAO

"Peace is a continuous process of finding balance at various levels, and between various oppositions and (sometimes false) dichotomies. At an individual level, it is probably the cultivation of compassion, or at least the attempt to do so! At the universal level, it would be the creation of conditions that provide all individuals with the opportunities and skills to be the best they can be."

Sarojini Rao is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Economics at Carleton College, Minnesota, USA.

ANISHA KINRA & SEEMA SRIDHAR

"Our pursuit for peace began by problematising the very notion of it. Was peace the mere absence of violence between two countries? Or did it mean something else, something more? What motivates groups of people to mutilate and slaughter one another? Why are more and more people – and not just in our two countries – taking to violence to make their voices heard? These critical questions of contemporary times marked the start of the journey we began."

Understanding peace and turmoil at the individual level and relating to one another at the human level were instrumental in our larger quest to understand conflict and envision a future bereft of it. ...We began to comprehend the complexities of our individual pursuits for peace. We realised that we often forget the fact that nations are a collection of individuals. To create a lasting impact on the behaviour of nation-states, we have to first go through transformative experiences as individuals. These individual journeys would then reflect at a higher level in the behaviour of the collective."

Anisha Kinra teaches Political Science at a community college in Gainesville, Florida, USA.

Seema Sridhar is a Doctoral Scholar at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

ASIFA HASAN

"I think it is very hard to define peace. By peace, I mean here an *attainable peace*. In our region, we face much violence and in so many forms that we tend to forget in our daily lives just what kind of peace we can have. However, in the context of India and Pakistan, peace is at least the acceptance of each other's existence, if not the complete elimination of hostilities; so that we *can* coexist without the perennial wish to eliminate the other. I hope that such acceptance will lead to a firm resolve to purge the root causes of anger and hatred for each other. Personally, I feel that we have already started in that direction."

Asifa Hasan is currently a Research Fellow with the Mahbub ul-Haq Human Development Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

NAUSHEEN WASI

"My deliberations now revolve around new questions: what should peace mean to an individual? And, more importantly, what should it mean for the state? The second question becomes important because individuals become beneficiaries only if new definitions of peace are adopted at the state level."

In the classical sense of the term, peace is understood to be the absence of violent conflict. I agree that conflicts at the state level arise from a web of complex reasons.

National interests are, often, too important to ignore. However, I believe that peace must include opportunities for all individuals to follow paths of their choice that lead to prosperity and pleasure.

In my opinion, peace is characterised by respect and goodwill. A state of peace does not translate into the acceptance of the rival's view or submission to the opponent's demand; it only means respect for "the other" and "her views."

Nausheen Wasi is a Lecturer at the Department of International Relations, University of Karachi, Pakistan.

SAIRA BANO ORAKZAI

"In my view, the basic reason for the prevalent attitude among the people of India and Pakistan is the absence of inner peace. One cannot achieve external peace until and unless there is peace inside the person herself. Peace lends an inner strength, a creative energy that sustains us. That enables us to construct bridges over the gaps that exist between appearances and reality. Only this variety of inner peace, I believe, will allow us to transcend and unify the seemingly-opposed principles of life, such that we do not see one another as rivals.

Peace is an experience of the unity that overcomes divisions in humanity such as the biases of religion, gender and class. Inner peace leads to tolerance, brotherhood and social healing; it eschews revenge.

It reminds us that reconciliation begins with our inner-self.

Just as we seek to reconcile the different aspects of our personalities (reason and passion, spirit and matter), so too we must aspire to reconcile the many voices of truth as they manifest themselves within societies and culture.

The absence of inner peace deprives us of the virtues of compassion, goodness and love of humanity beyond territories, boundaries and ideologies. When we analyse the societies of India and Pakistan, we find a general tendency towards violence, emotional outbursts and proliferation of conflicts at all levels.

Though the peace process is moving forward, more emphasis, in my opinion, should be laid on creating a culture of peace in societies which will, in turn, lead to an abhorrence of hatred, violence, injustice and oppression. Moreover, relations between the two nations should be based on what we share in common. Only by being tolerant of their differences can India and Pakistan enjoy a healthy relationship."

Saira Bano Orakzai is a Lecturer at the Department of International Relations, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan.

~



WILL OUR GENERATION DELIVER PEACE ?

LAALIT LOBO

"It always amuses me when I read questions like 'Will OUR generation deliver peace between India and Pakistan?' No, do not get me wrong. I am not trying to belittle an issue that is clearly crucial to the condition of one fifth of humanity. What amuses me is the use of the words 'OUR GENERATION', often italicised, underlined and capitalised or placed in inverted commas to suddenly create a grand vision of a mass of people brought together by their youth and righteous sense of purpose to change the world.

Other than being known as the *Rang de Basanti* generation or living in times of 24-hour news channels (that constantly beam images of youngsters in anti or pro reservation agitations and sepia-tinted candlelight vigils at the Wagah border), I do not see 'OUR' generation any better suited to bring peace to the subcontinent or anywhere else in the world than our parents were. In fact, our parents had the music of the Beatles and Bob Dylan as well as less foggy recollections of Mahatma Gandhi to help them in their peace missions.

Addressing the issue of whether India and Pakistan will kiss and make up in our lifetime, I would like to believe in *yes* but my gut says *no*.

Here is the reason for my pessimism. It is said that lasting peace is not possible until the problem of Kashmir is resolved; until the people of Kashmir enjoy the right of self-determination, which most presume to be the right to secede from India. I have never been to Jammu & Kashmir and have only one close Kashmiri friend (with whom I never discuss politics because our views are so strong and diametrically opposed that we fear for our friendship); so I am in no position to judge whether the demand for secession is justified or not.

However, I do believe that the secession of Kashmir will open a Pandora's Box with fatal consequences for India. Demands for secession are symptomatic of the complete failure of governance. Therefore, 'OUR' generation must enter politics and clean the system from within, making it responsive and honest. I do believe that we, the young citizens of India and Pakistan, need to get our hands dirty and fix the problems within our own countries, before we can hope to make peace with our neighbour.

The second reason why I believe that peace will not come easy or soon is this: the politicians in Pakistan will never give up the populist "anti-India" plank. The other day I read a newspaper article about General Musharraf exhorting his fellow citizens to recreate the spirit and euphoria of the war of 1965, a war he claims Pakistan won. Even if his claims were true, a war hardly ought to be the reason to bring a nation together. Even among moderate politicians in Pakistan, taking an anti-India, pro-Kashmir stand is an excellent way to earn brownie points with the masses; it is not as dangerous as going down the road of following a Taliban agenda, yet it is enough to keep the masses (and most of the *mullahs*) reasonably happy. I am also aware that Indian politicians are equally guilty of using pro-war hysteria to brush aside poor governance issues and win elections.

In India, thankfully, the politicians have stopped obsessing over Pakistan. While growing up in the 80s, I constantly heard politicians holding the "foreign hand" responsible for everything dreadful that happened in our country. No marks for guessing what the "foreign hand" referred to! Even in our Hindi movies, the "foreign hand" wreaked havoc.

Since the early 90s, Indian politicians have discovered that temples, mosques and caste-based reservation are polarising issues. However, in Pakistan, politicians appear to be united only by their fear of and hatred for India. Every time India builds a missile, Pakistan must build a more destructive one (and vice versa).

I think the best chance for peace will present itself only when the cost of war becomes too steep, not for the two countries, but for the politicians in each.

The next time politicians force our armies to go to war, vote them out (instead of rewarding them with electoral victories). We, the citizens of India and Pakistan, must make it clear to our politicians that we will vote for them only if they deliver on education, healthcare, infrastructure and employment; not if they aid terror in the other country or spend public money on building weapons of mass destruction."

Laalit Lobo is a Producer with the television news channel, TIMES NOW, Mumbai, India.

TALHA FASIH KHAN

"I believe that generations of taught mistrust, hatred, fear and insecurity cannot and will not be reversed within the span of our generation alone. Both India and Pakistan have to go a long way to go before they stop denigrating each other. The fear of the 'other' is embedded in our respective polities. Although there are many people on both sides of the divide who seek peace with "the other", and indeed have families across the border, they remain for the most part marginalised actors in a larger political endgame. Those who suffer are the poor, innocent, hapless souls of both countries; they are at the mercy of their government's propaganda machinery. This propaganda pervades through our lives on a daily basis, and one requires a lot of strength to break through its shackles.

I do believe that recent trends in track three diplomacy and people-to-people contact are encouraging. Communication between people on either side of the divide has improved through the institution of confidence building measures. Yet, I would be hesitant in considering this peacebuilding process sustainable. We remain at the mercy of our respective governments, and indeed events on a day-to-day basis. All it takes is a change of regime or a one-off terrorist attack to completely undo the work of civil societies on both sides to build a more prosperous, promising future for our countries."

Talha Fasih Khan is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Economics from Macalester College, Minnesota, USA.

AMBEREEN SHAH

"There are a number of people who are looking beyond political borders and working for peace between India and Pakistan, using dialogue as a means to bridge the gap between citizens on either side. There is another group of people, which cares little about these efforts. This group would like to have peace between the two nations, but is too preoccupied to be involved in the process. Then, there exists a third group, which continues to foment hatred. I am hopeful that our generation will at least work towards peace; even if we do not succeed, the next generation can take it further."

Ambereen Shah is a Communications Consultant with UNESCO, New Delhi, India. She is also a Doctoral Researcher at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

NIDHI SONI

"In my opinion, peace between India and Pakistan can become a reality only when we stop blaming each other for the past follies committed by our politicians, more so for their vested political and personal ambitions.

Our generation (on both sides) has been fed misinterpreted history. Unless we are able to overcome the consequences of the same and look at issues from a rational perspective, peace will not be easy to attain. We need to forgive and move on in order to strengthen our political, cultural and, most importantly, economic ties. We should learn from the people of Pakistan who are currently fighting tooth and nail to attain democracy. This is the kind of conviction and willpower we will need to usher in peace."

Nidhi Soni is an Editor with Newlink Services in New Delhi, India.

ASIFA HASAN

"It is hard to put a time limit on achieving peace, here in the subcontinent or anywhere else in the world. More important than knowing "when and who" is the fact that the process has started to move towards some kind of resolution.

I feel that our generation treats the Kashmir issue differently when compared to the last two generations. Our generation, on both sides of the border, ponders the Kashmir issue with a more practical approach, bearing in mind the socio-economic realities of our countries. There is a growing realisation among our generation that maintaining the conflict is not conducive to our long-term development. That carrying the burden of hatred is hard. This is primarily because this generation enjoys the privilege of being far enough from the memories of the partition to think objectively about the animosity between India and Pakistan."

Asifa Hasan is a Research Fellow with the Mahbub ul-Haq Human Development Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

NADIA UMAR

"It is rather debatable as to how our generation perceives the relationship between Pakistan and India. Unfortunately, most of our educated youth tend to migrate to foreign countries to establish their own futures. Hence, there are fewer people who will

WILL OUR GENERATION DELIVER PEACE ?

come back, enter politics and address the political ties between India and Pakistan. If one reflects back upon the history of the subcontinent, it can be said that no decision made so far has benefited either country. Hopefully, future generations will be able to approach the situation differently and re-establish amicable ties with India, a country that most of us have familial linkages with."

Nadia Umar is pursuing her Master's in Public Health at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

UMAIRA AMIR-UD-DIN

"To be able to think is what makes me human. To be able to think rationally is what gives me an edge over others. It is often that I am put through the test of being a Pakistani and am questioned about the partition, bilateral relations, multitrack diplomacy or conflict transformation. A prompt reply would be: 'Yes, I support my country, no matter what it takes. I would die for it too!' Yet, this is when rationality takes over and I am forced to rephrase my sentence: 'Yes, I support my country in every positive move. I would die for its betterment. A betterment that lies in peace and mutual benefit.'

It is not easy to think positively about something that has been a cause for anguish for over 60 years. The bitterness of partition has stung an entire generation who are unable to forget what they have seen. Amidst the deafening crescendo of haunting questions, the next generation has been left pondering over peace, prosperity and freedom.

Yes. There is a brighter chance for peace. If not 'absolute' peace, our generation will at least deliver 'more' peace

than the previous one. We have fewer reasons to hate each other. We are not eye witnesses to the bloodshed of partition. Education has enhanced our capacity to move beyond prejudices towards resolution. It has broadened our minds enough to respect each other's freedom. We now realise the need for working together in harmony towards mutual socio-economic goals and benefits. Writers, economists, intellectuals, social workers and youth realise the need for peace in the region."

Umaira Amir-ud-Din is currently associated with Maryna Pakistan Pvt. Ltd., Lahore, Pakistan.

FAROOQ AHMAD DAR

"I am an optimist and firmly believe that change is in the air. Over the last sixty years, we 'hated' the other or attempted to 'love' the other without truly knowing our opponents. Of late, youth from both sides have become interested in exploring each other. This is a sign of hope. If this process continues for a few more years, change is possible. Even if our generation fails to attain peace, we would have changed the mindset of the next generation, thus enabling them to attain what many may consider a miracle."

Farooq Ahmad Dar is a Lecturer in the Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

SAROJINI RAO

"Yes, I believe that our generation will deliver peace. Why not? And, do we really have a choice?"

Sarojini Rao is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Economics at Carleton College, Minnesota, USA.

~

WHY I CHOSE THE WORK I DO



MANOJ MATHEW

"In the unipolar world that emerged after the end of the Cold War, conflicts are more to do with intra-state than inter-state issues. The violence affects a large number of innocent people. The victims are mainly women, children and the elderly. Women suffer the most during and after a conflict, while often being denied any role in power sharing or peace agreements.

In this global village, one is affected by the upheavals in one's neighbourhood and hence, one cannot turn a blind eye to the turmoil. As a citizen of the global village, it becomes one's duty to facilitate the neighbour and fellow human being to find a solution to the conflict before the peace agreements (most of which do not last beyond five years) are signed and the doves are released.

Conflict has many dynamics, positive and negative. In the process of settling it, we may encounter many setbacks because of the numerous stakeholders involved – internal, regional and international. The endeavour is to transform conflict from a violent and brutal way of settling disputes to a scenario wherein the stakeholders find a middle path through dialogue. This process is very painful, slow and time consuming.

Peacebuilding is a frustrating and complex operation. With numerous stakeholders and parties involved, one false step can lead to the collapse of years of work. If the world is to be made a safe place for future generations, one has to work today in the so-called "most dangerous places" and help those facing the rage of war and conflict to build their lives. We must help them to shape their own destinies as they desire, rather than enforcing ideas and governance alien to them. This work, however, is a challenge that tests one's patience and resilience."

Manoj Mathew is associated with the United Nations and has recently completed an assignment in Herat, Afghanistan, as part of a team responsible for the successful conduct of Parliamentary elections in the Herat province. He is currently based in New Delhi, India.

AMBEREEN SHAH

"Having multiple identities (some in conflict with others) prompted me to work in the area of conflict

resolution. At times, people around me have questioned these identities.

I am an Indian, with first cousins in Bangladesh and Pakistan. How could we dislike each other and the land we live in? I can never understand the hatred people feel for each other. Similarly, my experiences in Palestine / Israel and Sri Lanka made me realise that it is *only* through dialogue, communication and a *just* peace that we can solve conflicts in these regions. A bullet fired or a city bombed is *not* the solution; it only aggravates the crisis."

Ambereen Shah is a Communications Consultant with UNESCO, New Delhi, India. She is also a Doctoral Researcher at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

ASIFA HASAN

"My area of work is political governance. The primary motivation has been the ever-growing crises of governance that we live amidst. South Asia's perennial quest for peace and human development is deeply rooted in a crisis of political governance. Incomplete, faulty and half-hearted political processes fail to mitigate poverty and conflict. Politics in South Asia serves to push people farther away from peace. Therefore, it is time to look at issues within the governance framework to explore the political reasons for the increasing misery of the masses in the region."

Asifa Hasan is currently a Research Fellow with the Mahbub ul-Haq Human Development Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

FAROOQ AHMAD DAR

"Who can better understand the importance of peace than a student of the political history of 20th century South Asia? Lessons learnt from the disasters of wars and hatred led me to understand that conflicts will not take us anywhere. If we want history not to repeat itself, we have to learn from the mistakes of the past. In addition, people like me have to give their one hundred percent to make the nation understand that history is the best teacher."

Farooq Ahmad Dar is a Lecturer in the Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

SAROJINI RAO

"In this day and age, we find a great deal of interest in 'development'. I find it extremely important to look at the constraints imposed by conflict, especially violence and terror, on the ways in which people can improve the quality of their own life. These constraints could be economic; they could be a violation of fundamental human rights; or they may contribute towards creating an atmosphere that is not conducive for self-actualisation. I am interested in studying various

kinds of constraints, their causes and effects. It is a particularly creative challenge to find ways to mitigate the ill effects of conflict; and, to transform conflicts into opportunities for real development."

Sarojini Rao is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Economics at Carleton College, Minnesota, USA.

~

INDIA DIARIES

**NADIA ANJUM**

"Do not judge your days by what you have achieved today, but by what you have sown today." This quotation on a wall at Delhi's airport gave me a wonderful insight into the Indian psyche as a nation. It reflected a positive, futuristic stance. This was *Lesson Number 1* (in India)."

Nadia Anjum is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, Pakistan.

SAIRA YAMIN

"The visit to Goa made me absolutely enamoured with India, made me ache to return. I also remember my brief layover in Mumbai en route to Goa. I had ventured out of the airport and hired an auto, the Pakistani equivalent of a *rickshaw*. It was almost as if I had stopped over in Karachi! The blaring music, the beggars, the hustle and bustle, the beach, the congestion! It was all too familiar."

"Delhi, like the rest of India, is mesmerising. It is a treasure chest of culture and history. It is said that you come across a monument at every turn in Delhi. This is truly how I found Delhi to be. The city has been built anew six times and this, perhaps, explains the enormity of the sprawling metropolis."

Saira Yamin teaches at the Department of Defence & Strategic Studies, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies in Conflict Analysis & Resolution at George Mason University, U.S.A.

RUBINA JABBAR

"Visiting Mumbai as a member of the Pakistani delegation at the World Social Forum 2004 was a treasured experience, which has inscribed many unforgettable moments on the slate of my memory. One such memory is the interesting encounter with an Indian taxi driver who drove us from Azad Maidan to India Gate after the closing ceremony of the Mumbai Forum.

...The 48-year-old taxi driver had never met a Pakistani before. The taxi driver, whose name we did not ask during that short ride, proceeded to make interesting enquiries about the country he had never visited, its people and its leaders, Musharraf and Benazir. 'Do the Pakistanis like Musharraf and the army?' he enquired. He went to admit that he hated politicians because they propagated war panic and animosity.

'People should not listen to them because it is the people who suffer,' he pointed out. 'It is enough. People are fed up. Resume the train service and let people come and go. Then, things will change,' he suggested."

Rubina Jabbar is a freelance writer presently based in Chicago, USA.

ANISHA KINRA & SEEMA SRIDHAR

"Travel, music and entertainment had their own roles to play in our journey. They left us mesmerised by the strength of their impact on our understanding of each other.

The overwhelming sight of the Taj Mahal in Agra sparked off discussions on whether the Taj was a symbol of love or merely that of Emperor Shah Jehan's ego. This debate provided delightful insights into people's worldviews which often clashed with more accepted perceptions of romance! The only consensus was over the magnificence and grandeur of the architectural wonder.

We enjoyed a wholesome spread of cultural explorations: the *antaakshari* sessions during the bus ride from Delhi to Agra; the enrapturing *qawwali* at the Salim Chisti Dargah in Fatehpur Sikri; shopping on the lanes of Janpath and at Dilli Haat; discovering similar tastes; discovering how Pakistanis love Bollywood music more than most Indians; shattering the common myth that all Indians are vegetarians; exchanging gifts!"

Anisha Kinra teaches Political Science at a community college in Gainesville, Florida (USA).

Seema Sridhar is a Doctoral Scholar at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

MUNA BAIG

"Although we were meeting to try and undo the ghosts of the partition and to dialogue with the-other-who-must-be-addressed-now for the sake of bringing a change in attitudes, I was left wondering if this was enough. I was left wondering whether the few moments – be it at the Taj Mahal in Agra or at Karim's in Old Delhi – when we lowered our guards in the face of complete exhilaration in each others' company were enough to bring about change. It seems to me like they were."

KASHIF SAEED

"In 2005, I represented the young people of Pakistan at UNESCO's International Conference on *Youth for Human Unity: Explorations for New Values through Inter-cultural and Inter-religious Dialogue* in the international township of Auroville located near Pondicherry in the deep south of India... At this conference, I met an Indian who had lost a brother and a friend in the Kargil conflict of 1999 between Pakistan and India. He warmly embraced me. While shedding tears for the dear ones he had lost, he also extended a hand of friendship with a prayer for peace between India and Pakistan. This experience became one of the most moving moments of my life. The Indian's gesture will remain inscribed in my heart for a long time to come. It was, perhaps, this poignant incident which made me an ambassador for Indo-Pak peace and unity."

Kashif Saeed is a Doctoral Scholar in Development Studies at UMB (The Norwegian University of Life Sciences), Aas, Norway.

UMAIRA AMIR-UD-DIN

"India is undeniably progressive and developing economically. It is culturally and historically rich enough to attract even the most indifferent eye. However, India too is unable to evade the western influence that comes with globalisation and is seeping into its younger generations and which is also highly evident in its media. The 10-day interaction with Indians at WISCOMP's Conflict Transformation Workshop resulted in a soft corner for the public and eroded many misconceptions.

The trip to India was a tremendous experience; a lot of learning, sharing, and understanding that culminated in a much-cherished memory of a lifetime. Thanks to WISCOMP for providing the opportunity to further comprehend the cause of peace! Long live the strife for peace!"

Umaira Amir-ud-Din is associated with Maryna Pakistan Pvt. Ltd., Lahore, Pakistan.

NADIA UMAR

"As frequent a traveller I have been in the past, I can definitely say that I have never been so eager about travelling to another country, as I was prior to my departure for India. Delhi was my first stopover and I felt as if I was home. It is rather fascinating that both countries are so similar, yet they have been able to

establish and preserve their respective cultures and traditions. The people are rather hospitable but there was a sense of melancholy once they discovered that I came from Pakistan. Most people that I interacted with on my trip (both within the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop and in the city) seemed to have family members living on the Pakistani side of the border. It makes one feel rather handicapped that there is nothing that one can do to erase the conflicting past; but it motivates a person to make a difference to the future. Nevertheless, it was one of my most memorable trips ever!

Nadia Umar is currently pursuing her Master's in Public Health at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

ASIFA HASAN

"There were two things in India that completely exceeded my expectations. Firstly, the level of professionalism among Indian people, which is quite amazing! Secondly, the abject poverty, which was also astounding. These two images – one of the brilliant people that I came across in the Workshop and the other of the miserable masses all over this beautiful country – became the defining images. I realised that we need to compete for better human capital, instead of racing for more nuclear arsenal. Now that we have enough arsenals to eliminate each other (one insecurity taken care of!), we should move on to the next stage and find ways to compete for higher human development."

Asifa Hasan is a Research Fellow with the Mahbub ul-Haq Human Development Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

FAROOQ AHMAD DAR

"I have been to India twice and have also had the opportunity to interact with Indians at various other places. Now, I have many close friends in India, something I never dared to think possible earlier. In spite of this, my observation – unlike that of many other friends who have also visited India – is that the people of the two countries do not share a common tradition and culture. Yet, this does not mean that the two countries cannot solve their problems or come closer. Friends need not be alike and can happily coexist with their differences and problems."

~

Farooq Ahmad Dar is a Lecturer in the Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

PAKISTAN DIARIES



SHREYA JANI

"My curiosity found the wings to fly when I was 16 years old. It was 1997 and my school decided to send twenty students to Pakistan to celebrate 50 years of independence from colonial rule. Soon, I was off on a two-week adventure through Lahore, Panja Sahib and Islamabad. This was an eye opener in my journey towards reconciliation, acceptance and understanding. Towards questioning popular stereotypes.

I finally got to see the excavation of the Indus valley civilization, Taxila, the fort of Akbar and the hand print of Guru Nanak on the rock at the Gurudwara of Panja Saheb. And, ate the world's best kebabs and chocolate cake in Lahore."

Shreya Jani recently completed her Masters' in Peace Education from the University for Peace, Costa Rica.

SMRITI VIJ

"As college life drew to a close, a series of rare opportunities emerged and broke the ice between my parents and me... I had been chosen to visit Lahore as part of a student delegation from Lady Shri Ram College. It was the first time that I was going to live away from home, even if just for a week! My parents were glad at what they felt was a rare opportunity. Besides the naive excitement of travelling abroad and to a normally unreachable country, I did not quite anticipate what was in store for me. Or how it would to impact me. The week that followed greatly surprised me. What I had imagined to be an unreachable foreign land felt instead like home!"

Smriti Vij is presently based in Mumbai, India, where she is looking to develop an independent career in scriptwriting and film-making.

RADHIKA GOVINDA

"It was the fascination with issues surrounding identity and otherness that led me to apply for a student exchange programme to Kinnaird College, Lahore (Pakistan) as a second-year undergraduate student at the Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Delhi.

...Visiting Pakistan was the culmination of a much cherished dream. It also brought home the reality that identity and otherness are indeed two sides of the same

coin. I found my Pakistani hosts to be extremely warm-hearted and caring. I was touched by the hospitality they extended to me and my friends from Delhi.

Yet, I also found the camps to be clearly demarcated in any debate on Pakistan-India relations. While my Pakistani and Indian friends wanted the issues of conflict to be amicably resolved, it was as if we could not help but support the official stance taken by our respective governments. And so, I suddenly found myself supporting the right-wing Hindu nationalist leader and then Prime Minister of India, A.B. Vajpayee in Pakistan! Clearly, identity and otherness surfaced differently in different circumstances!"

Radhika Govinda is a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Cambridge, UK.

SIDDHARTHA DAVE

"I enjoyed the entertainment provided by the *ricksshawala* enroute to Hotel Philati as he hummed songs of Mukesh and Rafi. Soon, I learnt that Lahoris are great eaters. They would spend Rs. 1.50 on food even when they earned only Rs. 1.00! Anarkali Bazaar, Gwalmandi and Food Street are places that aggravate the taste buds. A vegetarian, I would have faced troubles in any other part of the world, but not in Pakistan, the land of my brethren! I was served *chole puris* and *dal pulav*, whose taste was the same as home. The *rasmalai* and *gulab jamuns* were just as sweet, contrary to what we are indoctrinated to think."

Siddhartha Dave is a peace activist, currently with the Fredskorpsets' (Norwegian Peace Corps) Programme through the Foundation for Human Rights & Democracy, FORUM-ASIA, Bangkok.

AMBEREEN SHAH

"The people of Pakistan left a lasting impression on me. Perhaps that is why some of my close friends are from Pakistan."

Ambereen Shah is a Communications Consultant with UNESCO, New Delhi, India. She is also a Doctoral Researcher at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

~



ALUMNI OF THE WISCOMP CT WORKSHOPS

2001–2007

2007



Amina Afzal
Islamabad, Pakistan



Tahir Aziz
London, UK



Sahar Gul
Hyderabad, Pakistan



Ishrat Afshan Abbasi
Hyderabad, Pakistan



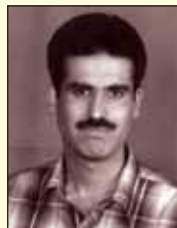
MonAmi Bannerjee
New Delhi, India



Arshi Saleem Hashmi
Islamabad, Pakistan



Mubarika Aijazuddin
Lahore, Pakistan



Ahsan ul-Haq Chishti
New Delhi, India



Humera Hussain
Islamabad, Pakistan



Syeda Nazoora Ali
Rawalpindi, Pakistan



Jayalakshmi Gopalan
Chennai, India



Javed M. Iqbal
Kargil, Kashmir



Ghulam Ali
Islamabad, Pakistan



Triveni Goswami
Guwahati, India



Navina Jafa
New Delhi, India



Swati Arora
New Delhi, India



Nabiha Gul
Karachi, Pakistan



Katha Kartiki
New Delhi, India

2007



Jamaluddin Khan
Quetta, Pakistan



Faiza Mir
Quetta, Pakistan



Gulrukh Sial
Islamabad, Pakistan



Swapna Kona
New Delhi, India



Sarmad Raza Nayak
Gujranwala, Pakistan



Kanika Sharma
New Delhi, India



Arvind Kumar
New Delhi, India



Sameer Suryakant Patil
New Delhi, India



Nida Sheikh
Srinagar, India



Chakraverti Mahajan
Chandigarh, India



**Muhammad
Khalid Qasmi**
Mumbai, India



Noorali Surali
Karachi, Pakistan



Tridivesh Singh Maini
New Delhi, India



Aamir Riaz
Rawalpindi, Pakistan



Penpa Tsering
Dharamsala, India



Qurrat-Ul-Ann Malik
Islamabad, Pakistan



Mariam Safi
Ontario, Canada

2005



Raouf Ahmed Ahanger
Srinagar, India



Asifa Hasan
Islamabad, Pakistan



Gulalai Khan
Lahore, Pakistan



Mohd. Arshad
Delhi, India



Sharmeen Irfan
Lahore, Pakistan



Maria Gulraize Khan
Lahore, Pakistan



Anuradha Choudry
Pondicherry, India



Rubina Jabbar
Karachi, Pakistan



Hasan Khan
Islamabad, Pakistan



Farooq Ahmad Dar
Islamabad, Pakistan



Divya Jacob
Chennai, India



Naseer Khora
Doda, India



Nyla Majeed Dar
Bijbehara, India



Musarrat Kalanchvi
Lahore, Pakistan



Nusrat Khurshedi
Karachi, Pakistan



Maria Saifuddin Effendi
Bradford, UK



Syed Sarwar Kashani
New Delhi, India



Anisha Kinra
Florida, USA

2005



Hammad Ahmad Malik
Islamabad, Pakistan



Kamran Rehmat
Islamabad, Pakistan



Nidhi Soni
Jammu, India



Sadia Munawar
Lahore, Pakistan



Sa'adia Reza
Karachi, Pakistan



Haroon Rashid Shah
Srinagar, India



Deepak Nair
Singapore



Seema Sridhar
New Delhi, India



Javed Ahmad Tak
Bijbehara, India



Amarah Niazi
Oregon, USA



Kashif Saeed
Peshawar, Pakistan



Sajad Ahmad Tak
Bijbehara, India



Saira Bano Orakzai
Peshawar, Pakistan



Navjot Bir Singh
New Delhi, India



Asma Yaqoob
Islamabad, Pakistan



Punam Pandey
New Delhi, India



Mohit Sinha
Bangalore, India

2004



Aabira Sher Afgan
Islamabad, Pakistan



Asma Awan
Lahore, Pakistan



Asma Jamil
Lahore, Pakistan



Raheel Ahmad
Aligarh, India



Imran Bashir Awan
Islamabad, Pakistan



Radhika Kanchana
Hyderabad, India



Zahid Shahab Ahmed
Islamabad, Pakistan



Michelle Baxter
Chennai, India



Saira Kashif
Lahore, Pakistan



Tariq Jawaid Alam
St. Louis, USA



Siddhartharai Dave
Baroda, India



Beena Qayyum Khan
Karachi, Pakistan



Umaira Amir-ud Din
Lahore, Pakistan



Pradeep Dutta
Jammu, India



Sardar Shahnawaz Khan
Rawalpindi, Pakistan



Nadia Anjum
Lahore, Pakistan



Sadaf Gilzai
New Delhi, India



Maria Kiani
Islamabad, Pakistan

2004



Dolly Kikon
Stanford, USA



Anupama Sekhar
Chennai, India



Khalida Tasneem
Islamabad, Pakistan



Ahmed Ijaz Malik
London, UK



Ambereen Shah
New Delhi, India



Ouseph Tharakan
Singapore



Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri
Karachi, Pakistan



Zulfiqar Ali Shah
Karachi, Pakistan



Monica Wahi
New Delhi, India



Sanam Noor
Karachi, Pakistan



Fakhra Siddiqui
New Delhi, India



Rangitabali Waikhom
Imphal, India



B. Rajeshwari
Dharamsala, India



Kavita Suri
Jammu, India



Syed Zia ul-Zubair
Srinagar, India



Sarojini V. Rao
Minnesota, USA



Farzana Gul Taj
Peshawar, Pakistan

ALUMNI OF THE WISCOMP CT WORKSHOPS

2003



Syeda Naghma Abidi
Michigan, USA



Arshia Ahmed Ayub
Hyderabad, India



Sarala Emmanuel
Colombo, Sri Lanka



Ambar Ahmad
New Delhi, India



Muna S. Arshed Baig
London, UK



Puskar Gautam
Kathmandu, Nepal



Aznin Aktar
Dhaka, Bangladesh



Babita Basnet
Kathmandu, Nepal



Nadia Umar Ghafoor
Melbourne, Australia



Khadija Amjad
Medford, USA



Sonam D. Chopel
Dharamsala, India



Manjita Gurung
Kathmandu, Nepal



Dorine Evanjalene
Arulanandam
Göteborg, Sweden



Shruti Debi
Kathmandu, Nepal



Abantee Harun
Dhaka, Bangladesh



Reshu Aryal
Kathmandu, Nepal



Ammara Durrani
Islamabad, Pakistan



Zakia Haque
Dhaka, Bangladesh

2003



Shabeen Hussain
New Delhi, India



Salma Mehr Fatima
Malik
Islamabad, Pakistan



Nilofer Afridi Qazi
Washington D.C, USA



Kaushikee
New Delhi, India



Manoj Mathew
New Delhi, India



Mirak Raheem
Colombo, Sri Lanka



Asif Hameed Khan
Bahawalpur, Pakistan



Vijaykumary Murugaiyah
Batticaloa, Sri Lanka



Md. Mizanur Rahman
Dhaka, Bangladesh



Talha Fasih Khan
Minnesota, USA



Tungshang Ningreichon
Kohima, India



Najma Sanai
Hyderabad, India



Deepti Mahajan
New Delhi, India



Kamala Parajuli
Kathmandu, Nepal



Ishani Sen
Ghaziabad, India



Fawad Irfan Malik
Bahawalpur, Pakistan



A. Inoka Priyadharshini
Nugegoda, Sri Lanka



Sadia Shaikh
Lahore, Pakistan

2003



Seema Shekhawat
Jammu, India



Malini Sur
Amsterdam
The Netherlands



Sharika Thiranagama
Edinburgh, UK



Rabia Tahmina Shoaib
Karachi, Pakistan



Biraj Swain
Delhi, India



Smriti Vij
Mumbai, India



Jyotshna Shreshtha
Kathmandu, Nepal



**Bhabananda
Takhellambam**
Imphal, India



Nausheen Wasi
Karachi, Pakistan



Tania Sultana
Dhaka, Bangladesh



Ranjana Thapa
Kathmandu, Nepal



Ather Zia
California, USA

ALUMNI OF THE WISCOMP CT WORKSHOPS

2001



Zahra Saleha Ahmad
Lahore, Pakistan



Radhika Govinda
Cambridge, UK



Laalit Lobo
Mumbai, India



Ranica Barua
Gurgaon, India



Bushra Qadim Hyder
Peshawar, Pakistan



Carol C. Maseyk
New Delhi, India



Namrita Batra
New Delhi, India



Nadia Islam
Lahore, Pakistan



Annette Phillip
Boston, UAE



Laila Bushra
Lahore, Pakistan



Shreya Jani
New Delhi, India



Ambreen Sehr Noon
Dubai, UAE



Jyotirmoy Chaudhuri
New Delhi, India



Ammar Khan
Gurgaon, India



Sadia Qutubuddin
Karachi, Pakistan



Rasika Dugal
New Delhi, India



Mansur Khan
New Delhi, India



Saumya Gautam Renaud
New Delhi, India

Alumni

ALUMNI OF THE WISCOMP CT WORKSHOPS

2001



Prerona Prasad
Cambridge, UK



Shefali Sewak
New Delhi, India



Bilal Murtaza Siddiqui
Lahore, Pakistan



Jaydeep Sarkar
Mumbai, India



Uttara Shahani
London, UK



Nandita Surendran
New Delhi, India



Puja Sarup
Mumbai, India



Jehanzeb Sherwani
Karachi, Pakistan



Ayesha Umar
Lahore, Pakistan



Aarti Sethi
New Delhi, India



Amal Ashraf Sheikh
Lahore, Pakistan

WISCOMP CT PUBLICATIONS



- Manjrika Sewak, *Rehumanising the Other* (First Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop) (2002)
- Meenakshi Gopinath and Manjrika Sewak, *Transcending Conflict* (Second Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop) (2004)
- Meenakshi Gopinath and Manjrika Sewak, *Dialogic Engagement* (Third Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop) (2005)
- Stuti Bhatnagar, Deepti Mahajan and Priya Parker, *Envisioning Futures: Dialogue and Conflict Transformation* (2006)
- Deepti Mahajan and Manjrika Sewak, *Kashmir: Engaging with Possibilities* (2006)
- Kevin Clements, *Dialogue, Multi-Track Diplomacy and Conflict Transformation*, CT Working Paper I (2006)
- Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, *Sustaining the Composite Dialogue*, CT Working Paper II (2006)
- S.P. Udayakumar, *Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence*, CT Working Paper III (2006)
- Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, *Solving the Kashmir Dispute: Is there a way out?*, CT Working Paper IV (2006)
- Priya Parker, *Sustained Dialogue Global Principles, Local Contexts: Engaging the Youth*, CT Working Paper V (2006)
- Bernd Papekort, *Dialogue and Conflict Transformation: Insights from Bosnia and Herzegovina*, CT Working Paper VI (2006)
- Sumona DasGupta and Manjrika Sewak, *Transforming Conflict in Jammu and Kashmir: Alternative Frameworks, New Metaphors*, CT Working Paper VII (2007)
- Manjrika Sewak, *School Curriculum and Pedagogy in India and Pakistan: Changing Profiles*, CT Working Paper VIII (2007)
- Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Michelle Baxter, *Attitudes of Teachers in India and Pakistan: Texts and Contexts*, Collaborative Research Studies –1 (2007)
- Deepti Mahajan, *Identity, Nation and Region: Trends and Concerns in South Asia*, CT Working Paper IX (2007)
- Tonusree Basu and Stuti Bhatnagar, *Role of the Media in the India-Pakistan Peace Process*, CT Working Paper X (2007)
- Stuti Bhatnagar, Deepti Mahajan and Manjrika Sewak, *Collaborative Explorations* (Fifth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop) (2007)

About this Publication

This publication is the outcome of a collaborative project undertaken by the South Asian alumni of the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshops. For over seven years now, WISCOMP has been bringing together youth leaders from South Asia for dialogues and trainings on peacebuilding. These dialogues have led to the initiation of several journeys of trust-building, mutual sharing and sustained dialogue between young women and men living across the divisions of conflict.

Closer to Ourselves: Stories from the Journey towards Peace in South Asia seeks to capture some of these experiences of personal change and social transformation, illustrating the power of human contact and its ability to empower individuals to engage in peacebuilding.

**Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
Foundation for Universal Responsibility
of His Holiness the Dalai Lama**

India Habitat Center
Core 4A, Upper Ground Floor
Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003 India
Tel: 91-11-24648450
Telefax: 91-11-24648451
Email: wiscomp2006@gmail.com
Website: www.wiscomp.org