SECULAR ETHICS
A YOUTH DIALOGUE

Held as a part of the
22\textsuperscript{nd} Annual Gurukul Program

Foundation for Universal Responsibility of HH The Dalai Lama

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Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace

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Meenakshi Gopinath
Director
WISCOMP
WI$COMP conducted a nine-hour workshop (24 July 2016) on Secular Ethics which provided an invigorating context for a dialogue on the film He Named Me Malala. Held at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala (the seat of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in India), the workshop brought together 35 university students pursuing diverse disciplines from across India. The students spent three weeks in Dharamsala as part of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s 22nd Annual Gurukul Immersion Program.

What united them was an abiding interest in Tibetan Buddhism, especially its emphasis on the cultivation of compassion and the Dalai Lama’s vision of Secular Ethics to build empathy between people of different religions, socioeconomic classes, and nationalities. The discussions were premised on those human values which resonated across religious and spiritual traditions and which, based on scientific research and empirical observation, have proved beneficial to the physical and psychological well-being of individuals.

The film provided a rich context for discussion on a wide range of issues such as gender stereotypes, girls’ education, the freedom of girls within homes, and the relationship between education, financial independence, land ownership,
and women’s empowerment. Even though the participants had heard of Malala Yousafzai, none of them were aware of her personal struggles and only few had read about the extent of her work as an advocate for the rights of girls across the world.

Raj Shah, a graduate student of Commerce, Ahmedabad University, Gujarat, shared:

‘The film on Malala Yousafzai is a great story of courage...It is a story that takes us beyond our nationalism. Nobody thought...in fact I didn’t think that I am an Indian, Pakistani, American or British citizen...It takes us far beyond the spheres of nationality and religion. I think that Malala Yousafzai is a great inspiration to fight against the wrongdoings in society, not just in the spheres of education or any particular dimension, but it is in itself a great journey...and as she mentioned during her Nobel speech...I am not afraid of the Taliban, I am not alone, the world is with me...I think this is a great learning for all of us...As an Indian, I feel very motivated that we have people who actually stand against what is wrong. And I think this is the greatest learning.’

The important role of parents was also flagged. Even if girls are living in a society which is very conservative and where gender equality is not an important value, but if they have a parent who thinks differently, who looks beyond ‘tradition’, this can make all
the difference to a girl’s life. Even though Malala’s father risked his family’s security by taking on the Taliban and opposing their distorted interpretation of Islam, by doing so, he influenced the lives of so many individuals in a positive way.

Participants were also able to connect the relevance of the film to similar challenges that India confronts with respect to giving importance to girl’s education. Mr. Anmolam, an L.LM student at the South Asian University, New Delhi, who also runs an NGO providing free legal aid to the poor, shared the example of the former Chief Justice of India, Palanisamy Sathasivam, who, in an interview, had talked about how when he was a teenager, both he and his older sister had wished to pursue careers in law. But his sister was unable to do so because if she had done law, their parents could not have afforded to pay for their son’s L.LB course. They chose to provide financial support for their son’s career at the cost of their daughter’s career aspirations. As Anmolam put it:

‘Although today in society, most of us would say that boys and girls are equal, this is not a true reflection of whether there is discrimination or not, particularly within the home. True equality will be when if there is only one opportunity, the girl is given that opportunity and not the boy.’
Profile of Resource Person

**Manjri Sewak** is pursuing a PhD on Education for Peace at the Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. A writer and trainer in the field of peacebuilding, she holds expertise in conflict transformation and curriculum development. She is the author of *Multi-Track Diplomacy between India and Pakistan: A Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Security* and has published articles on peace education, civil society peacebuilding, and reconciliation. She is a recipient of the RCSS-NTI Research Award and the Fulbright Conflict Resolution Scholarship. As a member of the visiting faculty for the Conflict Transformation Diploma Program at Lady Shri Ram College, Manjri has led the foundation course on Conflict Analysis and Conflict Transformation as well as co-taught courses on Dialogue, Mediation, Gandhi, Justice, and Reconciliation. She holds a Masters’ degree in Conflict Transformation from the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, Eastern Mennonite University, Virginia, and a Bachelors’ degree in Journalism from Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi.
List of Participants

1. **Abhinav Tyagi** is currently pursuing B. Sc. (PCM) from DAV PG College, Muzaffarnagar

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4. **Anmolam** is currently pursuing LLM from South Asian University, Delhi

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6. **Avi Chudasama** is currently pursuing Master in Design from National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad

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