

The Role of Educational Spaces in Fostering Gender Equality



Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
an initiative of

Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama



**The Role of Educational Spaces in Fostering
Gender Equality**

A Workshop Report

June 29, 2016

Bluebells School International
New Delhi

Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
an initiative of
Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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Acknowledgements

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Meenakshi Gopinath
Director
WISCOMP

Proceedings

Over 100 teachers of Bluebells School International joined the WISCOMP team at a workshop to explore *The Role of Educational Spaces in Fostering Gender Equality* on 29 June 2016. The film *He Named Me Malala* was screened to ignite discussion on the role of family, teachers, schools and the community in ensuring that girls have the right to a life of dignity and choice.

Meenakshi Gopinath, Director, WISCOMP opened the discussion by foregrounding the crucial role of educators in advancing gender equality by making schools more gender-sensitive and inclusive. The key concerns discussed at the workshop were: Gender-based discrimination by teachers when assigning responsibilities to students, gender-based expectations of family members (for example, resistance to boys joining home science club), and effects of religious beliefs on the position of girls and women within a community. Another issue that was addressed was the treatment of girls on the school sports field.

The post screening discussion on the film was facilitated by Manjri Sewak, Senior Fellow, WISCOMP and Seema Kakran, Deputy Director, WISCOMP. The discussion revolved around



Suman Kumar (Principal, Bluebells School International) sharing her insights on the film

women’s everyday experiences of violence, their resistances, the victories and the challenges that still remain in the path of gender justice. One of the participating educators poignantly said, ‘Malala’s story reminds us of the vital role that parents, especially fathers, can play in helping their daughters to realize their full potential and use their agency to affect social change’.

A part of the session focused on Malala’s courage, determination and perseverance, where a participant highlighted how Malala is an inspiration for many young girls across the globe. Further, drawing from Malala’s experiences, a participant said that one should undertake action to contribute towards changing gender-based discrimination, without looking for recognition or rewards.

While her father played an important role in shaping Malala’s life, discussion also highlighted that one shouldn’t overlook the contribution made by her school in Swat Valley, especially that of her teachers and her peer group. Another participant added that, “we all give things to our children but then, it’s ...what a child takes from the education he gets at schools [or] in homes. Everybody’s take back is different. What they turn out to be [depends on them]. Is it, [or] is it not? So everybody in a class of 35 gets the same thing, but everybody is taking back something



A participant sharing her views

different. So he [referring to Malala's father] definitely gave her a great name – Malala. But what she made out of it is her success.”

Connecting the concerns which were raised by the film with a personal experience, a participant shared her feelings at the time of her daughter's marriage. She described how her daughter was told by her grandparents that she shouldn't let her father down in her marital home as “he had raised her like a son!” The participant said that it was difficult for her to grapple with such remarks as they suggested that a girl must always be measured against boys; as if men are the norm and women the aberration. She added, ‘these are just questions for me. I ask this because such beliefs are embedded within us.’

Further, the group discussed the impact of violent extremism on the everyday lives of the people in areas like Swat Valley. A participant expressed her disquiet with the fact that extremists had been able to establish such stronghold in parts of the world where they could issue diktats to people. In such areas “both men and women were being told what to wear, what to say. You can't listen to music, you can't air your voices out in the public, you can't even get an education”. Comparing this reality of young people in some regions of the world with the situation the students in her school find themselves, the participant added “one must keep telling their kids that we live in a country where freedoms are available for all of us to enjoy. We somehow take our conditions so much for granted. The best part is, we live in a country where there is none or any of this”. Another participant explained how the film raised the issue of women who are forced to cover themselves under a veil and their individual identities get totally effaced because of the extremists.

Bringing together all the concerns which were raised during the workshop, Sewak concluded the discussion by deliberating upon the importance of curriculum in schools and expressed that a more gender-sensitive curriculum is an innovative way to expose students of elementary grades (at a relatively young age) to how gender roles and gender stereotypes are perpetuated. Further, she also talked about the relevance of concerns raised by the film in the context of Delhi. Referring to the family tree in the film, she pointed out that

till today, in many parts of the country, women struggle to own property, even in areas where they have access to opportunities for getting educated. She also flagged the complex relationship between education and gender-based violence. She gave the example of poor sex ratios in most urbanized parts of the country, especially New Delhi. In these areas despite high literacy rates Sex Ratio was highly skewed. In the context of these complexities, she expressed that one must keep questioning: Is the education our schools are providing, reducing violence against women and girls? If not, what can be done so that this goal is achieved? What is the quality of education if it fails to sensitize youth to these fundamental social issues?



A participating teacher commenting on the adverse sex ratio in the urban areas of India

Participant Feedback

It has indeed made me re-visit objectives of my being a teacher and has motivated me to take charge of situations of all kinds

If you feel you are supporting the right cause, then just go on and do what you feel is right

It made me much stronger as a woman

It's a great privilege to be an educator; you have the power to change the life of a child

I was inspired to encourage my maid's children to take up education seriously



Participants at the workshop

Workshop Participants

1. Abhishek Dutta
2. Alka Mahajan
3. Amarjit Kaur
4. Anisha Gupta
5. Arooshi Thakur
6. Arti Soni
7. Ashima Bhutani
8. Atoshi Mitra
9. Avinidita Chatterjee
10. Bani Malhotra
11. Barnali Ganguly
12. Bhavi Ahuja
13. Bhavna Bhasin
14. Bhavna Chauhan
15. Chandna Singh
16. D P Singh
17. Deepa Sharma
18. Dhira Madan
19. Disha Gupta
20. Divya Bisht
21. Divya Trijuni Joshi
22. Garima Verma
23. Gaurav Grover
24. Gautum Vats
25. Gurpreet Kaur
26. Harleen Sikka
27. Hinan Gupta
28. Jinie James
29. Juhi Taneja
30. Jyoti Verma
31. Kopila Sharma
32. Krishnaveni Vibinan
33. Laxmi Sharma
34. Manasi Tandon
35. Manmeet Janeja
36. Meenakshi Bana
37. Meenu Gupta
38. Mini Lihaha
39. Monica Kalra
40. Navita S Kapur
41. Neeru Bhushan
42. Nida Khan
43. Nidhi Malik
44. Nisha Mehdiratha
45. Pallavi Gupta
46. Pallavi Mahajan
47. Payal Sadana
48. Poonam Gandhi
49. Prabha Arora
50. Pradnya Sundararaj
51. Priya Kathuria
52. Priya Madan
53. Priyal Sehgal
54. Priyanka Malhotra
55. Priyanka Prakash
56. Prtatiba Abrol
57. Qamarudin
58. Ranju Bhatia
59. Rashmi Singh
60. Ravika Malhotra
61. Reena Prasad
62. Rehana Perveen
63. Ruchi Aggarwal
64. Ruchika Mehra
65. Samyukta Ninan
66. Sanghamitra
67. Sanjoli Jain
68. Sarbani Chatterjee
69. Savithri Ganesh
70. Seema Kalra
71. Sheeba Sachdev
72. Shewta Gupta
73. Shikhori Bannerjee
74. Sonali Kanwar
75. Sucharita Majumdar
76. Suman Kumar
77. Supriya Sharma
78. Surbhi Nigam
79. Sushma Dudeja
80. Tamanna Singh
81. Tarana Aggarwal
82. Umesh Madhok
83. Veena Suri
84. Vijay Anand
85. Vimmi Ghai
86. Virin Miglani
87. Yukti Nandurani

Remaining 16 participants were members of the administrative staff and Library.

Profiles of Resource Persons

Meenakshi Gopinath is the Founder and Director of WISCOMP and has served as Principal, Lady Shri Ram College for over 26 years. In addition to her work on higher education, her research interests and publications focus on issues of security, peacebuilding, gender, Gandhian philosophy, Marxist politics, Buddhism and the performing arts. Dr. Gopinath has piloted and fostered confidence building measures through regular conflict transformation workshops and collaborative projects among intellectuals of the SAARC region and especially between Pakistani and Indian young influentials. An innovative program in Kashmir, which networks and trains women for dialogue and peacebuilding envisioned by her is today recognized as an innovative model for recovering women's agency in areas of protracted conflict. Dr. Gopinath is a member of multi-track peace initiatives such as the longest sustaining Track II Neemrana Initiative, between India and Pakistan and the Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy. She was the first woman to serve on the National Security Advisory Board of India (2004 – 2006) where she sought to mainstream gender and human security concerns.

As part of her contribution to facilitate efforts to foster a culture of peace, Dr. Gopinath has written and lectured extensively on issues of Conflict Transformation, Peace building and Education for Peace in South Asia and internationally. She serves on the Governing Boards of research institutes, think tanks, NGOs and educational institutions. In pursuance of her commitment to develop programs for educating for peace, she is often called upon to develop curricula and courses of study in this growing and dynamic field. She remains an active participant in national and international civil society initiatives on fostering coexistence between communities, women's engagement in building peace and sustained dialogue processes. Her work in the area of enhancing excellence and equity in education spans over three decades. In recognition of her contribution to the field of women's education and empowerment, she has received several awards including: *Padma Shri Award, Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi Award, Rajiv Gandhi Award for Excellence in Education, Mahila Shiromani Award Delhi, Citizen Forum Award,*

Seema Kakran is Deputy Director, WISCOMP with over the 15 years of experience working with NGOs. At WISCOMP,

she is responsible for the grass roots peace building initiatives in Kashmir, mentoring of research by Scholars of Peace and Interns in the areas of Conflict resolution, international law and non-traditional security. Prior to joining WISCOMP she taught Political Science and International Relations for six years at colleges at Delhi University including Miranda House and Hindu College, and at University of Nebraska –Lincoln. She holds Bachelors and Master’s degrees in Political Science from University of Delhi and an M.Phil degree in Political Science from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She also holds a Graduate Certificate in Public Policy Analysis from University of Nebraska –Lincoln, USA. As an awardee of the Human Rights and Human Diversity Initiative, University of Nebraska she conducted a Research study with the National Human Rights Commission (India) in 2005. She was also a recipient of the Junior Research Fellowship (1992) of the University Grants Commission, India.

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.

GLIMPSES

