



Applying The Interactive Problem-Solving Approach : A Workshop Between Indian And Pakistani Women

Meenakshi Chhabra & Anila Asghar

Abstract

In this article we attempt to construct a framework to analyze the narratives of Indian and Pakistani women that emerge from the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 - an epoch-making event that touched the lives of millions of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. In this regard, three women from India and three from Pakistan met for an Interactive Problem-Solving Workshop at Harvard University, where the sharing of narratives from across conflict lines revealed the core constructs that had informed the perceptions of the participants from the two groups and so, had resulted in the delegitimization of the other. Independent narratives from both sides divulged that these constructs were mirror images, creating doubt amongst the participants about their own narratives and blurring the boundaries between the constructs. The core concepts that were being perceived as exclusive to the other community, such as the treatment of women, religious fundamentalism and the condition of minorities, became the reference points for collective inquiry. From this transformative moment, the process moved towards a shared analysis of the conflict and new interdependent narratives focusing on joint responsibility and action began to emerge.

Author Profile

Meenakshi Chhabra is an alumna from Lady Sri Ram College. She completed her PhD in Educational Studies from Lesley University in Cambridge, MA, USA. She currently serves there as an Assistant Professor in the Graduate Department of Interdisciplinary Inquiry. In addition to teaching at Lesley, she has consulted with Seeds of Peace, working with youth across conflicting countries. She has taught in Israel and at the University of Peace in Costa Rica and has been a Fulbright scholar.

Anila Asghar currently teaches at Johns Hopkins University, USA. She has been involved in human development, conflict transformation and education reforms in diverse contexts. Her work focuses on cognitive and emotional development. From 2001-2006 she was a Consultant with Seeds of Peace, New York, USA, where she facilitated sessions and conducted research on effective communication and co-existence between Indian and Pakistani youth, women, administrators, and teachers in the US, India and Pakistan.

Introduction

“He drew a circle and shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout,
But love and I had the wit to win,
We drew a circle that took him in” .
- Edwin Markham, *Outwitted*

Both the authors of this paper belong to the post-partition generation of South Asia. Yet, stories and images of partition have remained a constant reality for us through oral tradition, written history, and geographical maps that are associated with our respective national identities. The moment of partition has become the origin of new identity in the newly-defined homelands, for which the discourse centered on nostalgia and the loss of life, friends, and property. Boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ were clearly drawn.

As an Indian, I, Meenakshi, remember being told by my grandmother about how ruthlessly the Muslims had killed the Hindus and how they had been forced to leave their homes. Every time she shared these intense stories of partition, her indignation and anger were palpable. Simultaneously, the history lessons that I learnt at school echoed the same sense of loss with an emphasis on losing a part of the homeland with the hope that one day it will be a part of India. The enemy images of the “other” were painted as someone not to be trusted and a constant threat to the Indian nation.

As a Pakistani, I, Anila, had heard family stories that depicted the sense of loss of home and friends who were still living on the other side of the border. The national discourse was one of celebration on the creation of a separate homeland - not only had we gained independence from the British colonial rule, we had also freed ourselves as Muslims from the domination and subjugation of the Hindus. Attached to this celebration were the voices of loss and sacrifice of innocent lives during the partition at the hands of the Hindus.

These feelings of anxiety, hate, and anger for the other intensified through the three wars that the two countries had fought over the past fifty years. In addition, every act of communal violence in each of our countries was attributed to the “other.” Communication and interaction across the borders has been minimal since partition. However, outside those boundaries when Pakistanis and Indians meet, there is a natural positive *social* interaction due to similarities in culture. These conversations remain very congenial as long as they do not move in the

direction of the discussion around the conflict. For both of us it was the same till we started confronting the "other's" stories. These stories generated feelings of discomfort and frustration. Each of us felt the need to defend our country and to "convince" the other side about the rightness of our story. Through a deliberate attempt at engagement with each other around these issues we became aware of the "voices in our head" that challenged whatever the other said and inhibited us from listening to each other. We must admit that this has been a hard struggle and was a constant challenge. And yet we wanted to work together for peace.

We both believe in the unconditional dignity of and respect for human life. This passion has been the driving force for this joint work. So for the sake of peace we worked out a guiding principle for us, which was and continues to be - 'Creating Value for Peace'. In the midst of difficult and challenging moments we began to ask ourselves, "Is what I say and do contributing to the process of peace?" With this as a guiding principle, we started listening more to each other, becoming more aware of "the voices in our head," and constructing a common narrative out of both our stories - a narrative that included both our partial truths to make a new truth.

This new truth does not lie in negating our different narratives embedded within our larger realities and frameworks in each of our countries. It is not about each of our stories from an individual perspective, neither is it our story told exclusively from the standpoint of the other. It is about "integrating" these tales and perspectives into a meaningful narrative for creating the value of peace¹.

In this study, we draw on the narratives shared by the women from both sides of the India-Pakistan conflict. The three women that participated in the interactive dialogue brought their narratives in the form of images, beliefs and perceptions of the politics of partition and its subsequent and ongoing effects.

Social Transformation through Women's Conversations across Borders?

¹ Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism In Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

In the summer of 1999, one year after the nuclear testing by India and Pakistan, I, Meenakshi, coordinated an Interactive Problem Solving workshop² with women from India and Pakistan. This pilot workshop was based on the Interactive Problem-Solving Workshop approach to international conflicts developed by Herbert Kelman³ in the early 1990's at Harvard University⁴. As a student of Kelman, I, Meenakshi had participated as a third party in an Interactive Problem Solving workshop between the Israelis and Palestinians and witnessed the power and potential for meaningful conversations between communities polarized by long-term, protracted conflicts.

The relationship between India and Pakistan at this time was at one of its worst. Both countries had declared themselves nuclear powers, the Kargil War had started in May and the violence in Kashmir was escalating day-by-day. The effect of this was experienced by the Indian and Pakistani community in the United States. In New England, Massachusetts, there was an increased tension between them. Signs of this could be seen in social exchanges and interactions among the community members from both sides. It was against this backdrop that I decided to apply the Interactive Problem Solving Approach by bringing together members of the two communities in New England and provide a space for conversations about the issues around the conflict.

The Interactive Problem Solving approach is an unofficial third-party approach anchored in social psychology. It has been widely applied to other international and ethnic conflicts, for example, the conflict in Israel and Palestine, the conflict in Ireland and the conflict in Sri Lanka. The workshop model in its original form, brings together politically influential members (members who can influence policy in their respective communities) of conflicting parties in a private setting for direction communication. The intent is to provide the space for the parties to explore each other's perspectives and through a joint process of creative problem-solving, to generate new ideas for possible solutions that are mutually satisfactory. The goal is to transfer the learning and insights from the workshop into the political debate and decision-making process in the two communities.⁵ Kelman writes that the Israeli recognition of Palestinian nationhood in the year 1993 was an outcome that was a result of an interactive problem-solving workshop. The

² The workshop was organized with support from PICAR (Program for International Conflict Analysis and Resolution) at Harvard University.

³ Herbert C. Kelman, "Social Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict," in *Peacemaking in International Conflict methods and techniques* ed. I. William Zartman and J. Lewis Rasmussen (Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997),191-235.

⁴ I, Meenakshi, was greatly inspired to do this work after having participated in the interactive problem-solving workshop by Prof Kelman, between Israelis and Palestinians at the Harvard University.

⁵ H. Kelman, "Social Psychological Contribution to Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in the Middle East," *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 47 (1), (1998) : 5-28.

participants in that workshop were in positions of power and influence in their respective communities and were able to filter the workshop dialogue into mutual recognition. This was a huge step at that point, given the long history of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Most attempts at conflict resolution in the India-Pakistan conflict have been made through various official agreements at the inter-state level. By far, these agreements have failed to address the needs and fears of the conflicting parties. Both sides had invariably framed their responses in terms of the use of threat, military pressure, nuclear deterrence and other coercive means. Such a belligerent approach had clearly not contributed to transforming the relationship of mistrust between the two countries. The focus of this Interactive Problem-Solving workshop was to engage civil society in general and women in particular, to bring their thinking about the issues of the conflict and subsequently, their contribution to social transformation. The voice of the people and their experiences, especially those of women of the India-Pakistan conflict has been largely missing from the discourse. Recent research has begun to fill that gap⁶.

The idea of a workshop with women was guided by a similar rationale. The primary reason was to make women "a focus of inquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative"⁷. Another reason for the "all-women" participation was guided by the notion that since women and men are affected by the conflict in different ways, women may understand and react to it differently. Now that war involves women as never before, we can look to them for new viewpoints and ideas in relation to the peace process. Moreover, contemporary scholarship questions the traditional notion about women as passive victims in war contexts, and focuses on exploring the ways in which women understand, negotiate, and deal with political violence in their daily lives. Conflict shapes and transforms women's lives in myriad ways. Women's peace movements in different South Asian countries, for example, empower them as they carve out an active role for themselves in the public sphere⁸. Also, in Sheldon's view, women can bring fresh perspectives as "outsiders" to the war system's traditional reasons and justifications for war. Women question whether making war is an inevitable part of human nature and envision societies without war. Told they are naive idealists for doing so, women stubbornly maintain that their idealism is in fact common sense.

⁶ Ritu Menon & Kamla Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998)

Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, (India: Penguin Books, 1998)

⁷ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988)

⁸ Rita Manchanda, *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency* (London: Sage Publications, 2001)

Survival depends on understanding and arresting the impulse to destroy, which today as never before in history, is capable of extinguishing humanity altogether⁹.

The goal of the workshop was to initiate a conversation through deliberate engagement aiming at “exercising the art of enlarged thinking”. It was not about reaching a unanimous consensus on the conflicting constructs, but to develop an awareness and acknowledgement of the diverse views around the issue. According to Benhabib, in a “moral conversation” one seeks to engage with the “other” to understand the issue, and to “reach some reasonable agreement. The goal of such conversation is not consensus or unanimity but the anticipated communication with others whom I know I must finally come to some agreement”¹⁰.

Three women from Pakistan and three from India participated in the workshop. In addition to accessibility, the criteria for participation were: people who had some knowledge about the conflict, who were not on the extreme side of the political spectrum, who were in some capacity socially engaged in their respective communities, and who were interested in attending the workshop or more appropriately, felt motivated to attend it. Finally the selection was done through acquaintances and recommendations from both sides.

Among the three women from Pakistan, Saima was from the generation that had directly experienced partition¹¹. She had moved with her family to Karachi from India during the partition. Later, she moved to the US and has been settled in the United States for the last twenty years. She is a teacher of Social Sciences in the school system in her community. Ishrat was a business entrepreneur from Lahore and had moved to the US six years back, with a background in International Relations and was from the post-partition generation. She is actively engaged in the Pakistani Association in Boston. Anila, was the third participant. She was also from the post-partition generation and had been in the US for a little over a year in pursuit of a doctoral degree at Harvard University.

From the Indian side, one of the participants was from the generation that had experienced partition as a child. Harnoor was from Punjab, a state that shares a long stretch of the border with Pakistan. She grew up in Britain and has been living in the US for almost twenty years. She is an activist in the South Asian community, and has started initiatives in the Boston area for the rights of South Asian women. Another participant - Radhika - was from a Hindu family of Kashmir and was also

⁹ Sayre Sheldon, *Her War Story* (Southern Illinois: University Press, 1999)

¹⁰ Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism In Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992)

¹¹ We are not using participants' real names in this study. Instead, we have assigned them aliases to protect their privacy.

from the post-partition generation, having moved to the US five or six years back. The third participant was from South India. Anjana has been in the US for fifteen years or so and is an active member of the Hindu and Indian Associations in Greater Boston.

Format

The format of the workshop constituted: a) one pre-workshop session with each country group, b) two joint sessions with both groups, c) post-workshop interviews with the participants individually¹² and d) a concluding joint session. All these sessions were facilitated by a third party experienced in the interactive problem-solving approach, comprising of two women associated with the Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution (PICAR) at Harvard University. We had different roles in the process. One of us was a participant (Anila) the other a participant-observer (Meenakshi), since the interactive sessions were not taped.

Process

The pre-workshop sessions held separately with each group provided the participants an opportunity to acquaint themselves with each other and to learn about the spectrum of opinions within each group. The pre-workshop session enabled the third party to observe the internal processes within each party that were an essential element of the process of inter-group conflict. They provided valuable information about the conflict and helped in planning the topics for the workshop itself. These pre-workshop sessions also uncovered some underlying stereotypes about the other held by each side. The different ethnicities within each group and the resulting wide spectrum of opinions on each side illuminated the complexity of the conflict. The atmosphere was quite different in each of the pre-workshop sessions. There was greater disagreement amongst the Indian group as compared to the Pakistanis in relation to the history of the Indo-Pak conflict, for example, while some of the Indian participants accepted the reasoning behind partition, others expressed their disagreement about its justification. Among the Pakistani participants there was unanimous agreement about partition. There were also some common issues identified by both. These included the colonial experience and the role of the British, the partition in 1947, the Kashmir issue and the Hindu-Muslim aspect of the conflict.

The Pakistanis felt that the conflict between the two countries persists because Indians have never accepted the partition and the existence of Pakistan, that the

¹² The post-workshop interviews are not a part of the original design of the interactive problem-solving workshops. These interviews were conducted by Meenakshi to assess and record the outcome of the interactive sessions.

treatment of the Muslims in India by the Hindus is far from desirable and that India was forcibly occupying Kashmir, which has a majority Muslim population. The Indian group felt that the partition had divided India, that Kashmir was India's territory and that Muslims were perceived as fanatical and threatening to the Hindus and to the security of the country. Both the groups agreed in the perception that both had suffered the trauma of the partition of 1947. Both groups also shared concerns about patriarchy in their respective communities. The workshop session was scheduled after a week of the pre-workshops, due to the scheduling constraints of the participants and of the third party.

The workshop seating was a little formal, around a table. The third party sat at the opposite ends of the table, the participants sat as a mixed group, two of the same group on each side and I, Meenakshi, seated myself just a little away from the table, in a position to be able to observe and take notes. Like the pre-workshop sessions, these sessions were also not recorded, to ensure complete confidentiality and safety of the participants and the process. The third party gave a brief introduction of the process by setting out the ground rules. The complete confidentiality of the workshop was emphasized, further explained as confidentiality as well as the non-attribution of the ideas that emerged as part of the workshop. The role of the third party in the process was described. It was explained that the third party was not an audience to be convinced or the judges of a debate who were determining which party had a better case. The third party would not intervene in any substantive issue. Interventions would be made to conversations directly between the two parties, to clarify, to summarize, and to challenge the parties to look at the conflict as a joint problem.

The workshop proceeded with the third party laying out the framework of the fundamental issues that both groups had raised in the pre-workshop sessions. These were defined as the issues that centered on the partition and on Kashmir. Initiated by one of the Indian participants, the groups entered into a discussion about who were considered "heroes" in each of their countries. As the discussion unfolded, both groups realized that the heroes of one side were the "bad guys" of the other. This led to a discussion and comparison of each group's perceived reality of the partition and of independence. Some of the participants in each of the groups brought in the issues of the writing of history, the content of the elite, the treatment of minorities in both the countries and the effect of these on the perpetuation of the conflict and mistrust between the two communities. A unique feature of the first session was that the participants had created their own agenda, which had steered away from the initial prompt of the third party, to focus on the issues identified by each of the groups in the pre-workshop session.

In order to provide some structure to the discussion in this session, the third party prompted the participants to explore the underlying needs and fears of each group vis-à-vis the other. This led to a discussion on the Kashmir issue, in the context of the treatment of minorities and of the religious identities of Hindus and Muslims. This progressed into conversations about who are the stakeholders who have vested interests in the continuation of the conflict, and how these stakeholders have systematically developed hostility in both communities. This helped participants move towards a joint analysis of the conflict. At this stage, the third party made a significant intervention by questioning the participants about the needs and fears prevalent in the communities that in turn, facilitated such actions by the stakeholders. Due to the limitation of time, this question could not be explored fully. However, during this session, the question focused the discussion towards the crucial concerns of the participants about the conflict.

Although there were only two workshop sessions scheduled, the groups expressed their desire to have another one, to be able to explore joint suggestions and actions that they could take in the direction of conflict resolution. This session was scheduled after three weeks, giving enough time to the participants to reflect on the content and process of the workshop. During this time, the post-workshop interviews were conducted with the participants individually. A summary of the core issues that had emerged was shared with each of the participants. After going through several drafts, the participants reached an agreement about the core issues. In this sense, the process of the interviews became critical in setting the stage for the last session. It helped to bring the participants to the same starting point and to begin to think in the direction of assuming shared responsibility.

The focus of the last session was on brainstorming ideas for joint action in the direction of conflict resolution at different levels. Some concrete suggestions that emerged out of this discussion were:

- a) To jointly work on a paper analyzing the content of history taught in the schools in both the countries and how that contributes to the perpetuation of conflict between the two countries.
- b) To exchange experiences and the trauma experienced by both sides relating to the partition of 1947 in a session on oral history and to invite Pakistani and Indian historians for the session and to provide a theoretical framework to the experiences.
- c) To continue the dialogue and conversations within the larger group by continuing informal interactions between the participants.
- d) To promote joint cultural events between the two communities in the Greater Boston area.
- e) For the participants to share their learning form this workshop within their respective communities.

Analysis & Discussion

For the purpose of the analysis, we gathered our data from notes that I, Meenakshi, had taken during the sessions which included the key points noted in the pre- and post-individual interviews with the participants. We also took note of our recollections of the process as a participant and as a participant observer respectively.

The questions that guided our analysis of the narratives were: What were the perceptions of Pakistani and Indian women around the moment of partition? How did each group react to the other's story? What were the differences and the overlaps in their narratives? In what ways, if any, did the two narratives change through this interaction and dialogue?

As a strategy for analyzing the narratives, we identified the core concepts that had repeatedly surfaced in the discussion during the sessions. The critical points for us were those constructs that both groups were using to delegitimize the other. The overlapping and intersecting of these constructs created mirror images in their narratives. In the analysis we used these mirror images as focal points of exploration. Of course, there were divergent views within each group. Some of the participants were not polemic in their discussion. They brought in an enlarged perspective of the issues. These participants played an active role at different times in the workshop helping the participants to recognize the overlapping and intersecting of the constructs that each side was claiming exclusivity of.

Perspectives from the Indian Participants:

- India is a "multi-ethnic, multi-religious country", constant interference from Pakistan with regards to the Muslim population in India is not appreciated.
- The perception exists that "aggression has always been initiated by Pakistan".
- Strong military influence in the politics of Pakistan raises the concern amongst Indians of Pakistan readily adopting a military course as opposed to a democratic one.
- The strong influence of the US and of China on the decision-makers in Pakistan raises the concern that it introduces new players in the power politics of the region and increases the threat of an arms race with these powers (because of the perceived help of both the US and China to Pakistan).
- The Kashmir issue raises the fear of increased instability in the region and a concern that it may lead to the further disintegration of the country. The concern that all "terrorist activities" in Kashmir are being supported by Pakistan was also expressed. The Indian participants were of the view that Kashmir was an internal

problem and Pakistan's repeated interference in the issue has raised suspicion about Pakistan's intentions.

- The fear of Islamic fundamentalism, especially with regards to the perception of *jihad*, also exists. The concern that Islamic law "does not treat women equally" discourages education amongst women and perpetuates "backwardness" in the country.

Perspectives from the Pakistani Participants:

- India, as the largest country in the region, has problems with all its neighbors.
- There is the constant fear in Pakistan of being annexed by India.
- There is the concern that India has never accepted the 1947 partition.
- There is concern that India is a predominantly Hindu state and that Hindus do not respect Muslims as a religious group.
- There is also the concern about the conditions of Muslims in India – that they are not treated equally. Also, there is a fear amongst them of being forced to convert to Hinduism.
- History has taught that Islam has given equal rights to women. But, Hinduism threatens that equality.
- The Kashmir issue raises concerns about the Muslims in Kashmir. They are being persecuted by the Indian military and their basic human rights are being threatened. India is forcibly controlling Kashmir.

Conflicting Perceptions

The Kashmir issue emerged as the tip of the iceberg in this process, bringing to light some of the underlying issues in the conflict. In the discussion centered on the moment of partition, some of the differences in interpretation that emerged from the narratives were: for the Indian participants, partition was a division of the country; it was a loss. For the Pakistani participants, it was the need of the time, the only way to ensure the protection of the rights of the Muslims, in pre-partition India. Independence, for the Indian group signified independence from the British, while for the Pakistani group it meant independence from the British and the Hindus in India. This difference of perception was also reflected in the language used by each side. While the Pakistanis called the movement for an independent Kashmir as a movement by "freedom fighters", the Indians addressed it as an "act of terrorism". In the same light, the Indian participants also learnt that the popular sentiments and language expressed amongst Indians about becoming one nation again were perceived as threats by the Pakistanis and raised suspicion among them about India's intentions.

Mirror Images

The sharing of narratives from across conflict lines revealed the core constructs that each group was anchoring on to delegitimize the other. Some of the core concepts that were being perceived as exclusive to the other community were: a) the oppressive treatment of women, b) religious fundamentalism, c) aggression and d) the unequal treatment of minorities.

Core Concepts	Indian Participants' Perceptions of Pakistan	Pakistani Participants' Perceptions of India
The oppressive treatment of women	Muslim women are veiled and kept "backward."	Indian culture has oppressed women historically. We still hear incidents of "sati" (women burnt alive on the husband's pyre).
Religious fundamentalism	Islamic fundamentalism	The Hindu hardliners' approach has resulted in communal riots against Muslims in India.
Aggression	Pakistan has mostly had a military government, which has always initiated armed aggression against India.	India wants to dominate the smaller countries in South Asia and all its policies are directed towards that goal.
Treatment of minorities	The majority of the population in Pakistan is Muslim and the minorities have no voice.	Muslims in India cannot practice their rituals. There are restrictions on their religious practices.

These core concepts illustrate that both sides had similar concerns about the other. The concerns featured around the social, political, religious and cultural milieu. For example, around women the Pakistani women brought up the issue of *sati*. The Indian women echoed the same tone in their response and brought up their fear about the subjugation of Pakistani women in the name of Islam and its ramifications for Indian women. In this particular discussion, the frameworks centered on the oppression of women in the "other's land". This started a discourse around defending their positions to deny the allegations. The Indian women explained that *sati* as a practice was not existent anymore. One of the Indian women explicated her view about *sati* as an optional ritual practiced by women of that time. The women from Pakistan reiterated that Islam stands for equality and women's rights, contrary to the Indian women's perception.

At this point, one of the participants acknowledged some elements of the oppression of women in her society, opening the way for the other group to accept the same in their context. This intervention acted as a point of building common ground among all the participants enabling them to shift the focus from their national identity to a gender identity. Within this gender framework, they came together as one group acknowledging their common concerns as women, moving in the direction of collective inquiry and action. They expressed the desire to continue similar kinds of dialogue to raise awareness about women's rights in the South Asian context and to spread this awareness among other women from the region.

The issue of rights and treatments of the minorities emerged as another core concept in the group. The discussion started off with exclusive frameworks around suppression of minorities in both the countries. One of the Pakistani women expressed a deep concern about the plight of the Muslim minority in India. She believed that Muslims were not offered equal economic opportunities in India. Indian women contradicted this conception and cited a number of examples to demonstrate that Muslims participated equally in the social, economic and political arenas of India. In their view, the Muslim population in India is more than in Pakistan and so, their rights were affirmed. They asserted that India being a secular democracy has always encouraged all minorities equally and that Pakistan being a Muslim majority state does not acknowledge the rights of minorities.

One of the participants from the Indian group shared her dissenting voice about the violation of minority rights in certain parts of India through examples of communal rights and separatist movements in different parts of the country. This in-group diversity in thought seeded cohesion in the larger group within this particular context. A Pakistani participant reciprocated by sharing her concern about the serious problems being faced by the minorities in Pakistan. This shift in the discourse enabled the participants from both sides to acknowledge the violation of rights of minorities as a universal issue. This exposure to the mirror images and a subsequent sharing and acknowledgement led to the broadening of mutually exclusive frames. The frames that were only centered on the mistreatment of minorities in the *other's* world were enlarged to include all minorities, even those who were suffering in their own societies.

Both sides accused each other's country for initiating aggression in the region. The "other" was the aggressor, whereas their country's act of aggression was justified as an act of defense. According to one of the Indian participants, Pakistan's military government promoted a policy of aggression against India. For the Pakistani participants, India's "hegemonic behavior" in the region and its resulting aggression was of great concern and a constant threat. They were of the view that

Pakistan's decision to nuclearize itself was a response to this threat. The ensuing discussion helped both sides to acknowledge the rising aggression in both the countries and the policy of deterrence employed by both and how that was adversely affecting peace in the region.

Religion was another core construct that surfaced on a number of occasions in the discourse. Pakistani participants felt that the Muslims in India suffer at the hands of the Hindu majority because of their religious beliefs. Cases of communal riots against the Muslims were mentioned. Likewise, the Indian women expressed a strong fear about the Islamic fundamentalism of Pakistan being exported to India, posing a threat to their secular institutions. They also expressed another fear that was related to Pakistan having a history of military and theocratic governments. The Pakistani participants, on the other hand, defined their constitution as upholding human rights. This came as a surprise to some of the Indian participants who believed that Pakistan only had a strict Islamic law, which discriminated against non-Muslims.

The momentous process of confronting these multiple core constructs of themselves by the other brought out questions about the sources of these images. A number of participants traced these to the media and the school curriculum of history in both the countries. In this way, the participants started exploring the roots of their constructs, which they had been using to delegitimize the other. This suggests that participants from both groups evaluated their frames with reference to the larger context, about which they shared multiple constructs. The recognition of these aspects of this larger reality contributed to the further broadening of their narratives. This is in line with Schon and Rein's view that individuals who hold conflicting views of *some* reality, about which they are locked in intractable controversy, nevertheless live in a *larger* reality, an everyday world about which they share many perceptions¹³.

This led to a "creative redefinition of the conflict"¹⁴ through collaborative re-examination of the issues and raising new questions. Some of these questions were: "Who is benefiting from the perpetuation of the conflict?", "What is the role of the international community in this conflict?" The individuals contributed to a deeper understanding of the conflict in which they were entangled through shared analysis of issues common to both the countries. The shared concerns voiced by both groups focused on issues of war, partition and women's rights. For example, all the participants felt that war is not a solution to the conflict. They expressed a

¹³ Donald Schon and Martin Rein, *Frame reflection: Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

¹⁴ Herbert C. Kelman, "Social Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict," in *Peacemaking in International Conflict Methods and Techniques*, ed. I. William Zartman and J. Lewis Rasmussen (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 191-235.

desire to meet each other, dialogue, learn and understand each other on a people-to-people level (an opportunity that is rare for both groups in their respective countries). Some shared the need to analyze and reflect on the multiple, often conflicting, accounts of partition narrated to both sides. Both sides agreed that there was a need to process the “shared trauma” of partition in 1947 and share the “stories” from both sides on a personal level. A shared concern for the rights of women in both countries also emerged as an important area for further exploration and joint analysis.

On further exploration of these concerns, participants identified the political, social and economic factors common to both the countries, that they felt were contributing towards sustaining the conflict. The common concerns encompassed a wide range of issues on both sides, such as extreme poverty in both India and Pakistan and social inequalities resulting from the class and caste systems, rampant illiteracy, the treatment of minorities, subjectivity in the writing of history, and an “undemocratic” political order in both the countries where the voice of the people has been suppressed and power is concentrated in the hands of few.

Conclusion

The Interactive Problem-Solving Workshop among Pakistani and Indian participants stimulated new insights into the dynamics of the conflict. Besides providing a safe environment for discussing difficult issues around the conflict, the workshop process facilitated an analytical discussion of the conflict. Through the process of the pre-workshop and workshop sessions the discussion moved from a simplistic description of the conflict to a discussion that revealed a wide spectrum of opinion within each group, called for more inquiry from each side and revealed the complex nature of the conflict. The participants brought conflicting perceptions about the *other*, which they had been firmly holding on to as their exclusive narratives. However, a discussion around these revealed these narratives as mirror images of each other. These mirror images created a doubt among the participants about their own narratives, about themselves and that which they were holding of the other, blurring the boundaries between *us* and *them*. This created moments of acknowledging the *other's* narrative, initiating a process of synthesizing elements from their conflicting narratives to jointly construct an enlarged framework that included the *other*. As a result, the conflicting perceptions that surfaced gave rise not to paralysis or deadlock, but to adjustment or accommodation, and in some instances, “reframing” of the narratives around common issues¹⁵ and a gearing towards joint inquiry and action.

¹⁵ Donald Schon and Martin Rein, *Frame reflection: Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

These kind of interactive dialogues between cultures have the potential of having far-reaching implications in terms of developing greater understanding of and questioning assumptions about the *other*. The interactive workshop model provides a structured and safe environment for a joint and critical analysis of the issues on the part of the parties engaged in the conflict, creating a web of relationships through sustained and genuine dialogue at all levels of society - social, political and religious. Changes at the level of individuals, in the form of new insights and ideas, resulting from the critical and collaborative discourse can then be fed back into the political debate and decision-making in the two communities, thus becoming vehicles for change at the macro level¹⁶. It is important to encourage an ongoing process of interactive dialogue between the two communities at different levels, particularly in the wake of the global and political changes affecting the peace and security of South Asia.

*Two roads diverged in a wood,
And I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*
- Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*

Since then, the two of us, Meenakshi and Anila, have continued working together. In 2001 we were able to extend our work to the youth from India and Pakistan. We have continued to work with youth and educators from across borders and jointly write about these interactions. We have been exploring the ideas of Pakistani and Indian adolescents about the India-Pakistan conflict and how their understanding evolves as they engage in conversations with each other. It has been a transformative journey for us as we hope it has been for the youth¹⁷.

¹⁶ Herbert C. Kelman, (1997), op cit., 191-235.

¹⁷ M. Chhabra & A. Asghar, "Development as Peace: A Vision of Hope in the India-Pakistan Conflict," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* (First Issue, American University Press, 2002).

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