Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding for a New Generation

The WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Program
2001–2012

Meenakshi Gopinath
Manjrika Sewak
Bridging the Divide:
Peacebuilding for a New Generation

Learnings from
The WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Program

2001–2012

Meenakshi Gopinath
Manjrika Sewak
Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding for a New Generation
Learnings from the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Program
2001–2012

Copyright © WISCOMP, Foundation for Universal Responsibility, New Delhi, India, 2014

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.

ISBN: 978-81-923813-2-9

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

Support for this publication was provided by the Government of Finland. The WISCOMP team is extremely grateful to the Embassy of Finland, New Delhi, for its valuable support and guidance to the Conflict Transformation Workshops. We also acknowledge with deep gratitude the support of the Ford Foundation’s South Asia Office in New Delhi.

Printed by:
Darshan Kumar Bhatia, New Delhi
Contents

About this Publication ................................................................. 5
Acknowledgments ........................................................................ 6
Introduction .................................................................................. 7

The WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Program: A Background .......... 10
Participant Profiles ....................................................................... 18
Workshop Pedagogy ....................................................................... 25
Research Methodology ................................................................... 30

Chapter 1
The First Encounter: Meeting the Other in a Space of Trust .............. 33

Chapter 2
Theories of Change ...................................................................... 39
  2.1. Conflict Analysis: Sources of Otherization and Humanization ........ 45
  2.2. Sustained Dialogue and Cross-Border Strategic Relationships ........ 50
  2.3. Professional Training in Conflict Transformation .......................... 51
  2.4. Multi-Track Diplomacy: Focus on the ‘Strategic Who’ ..................... 55
  2.5. ‘Our Generation Will Deliver Peace...?’ ....................................... 56
  2.6. Individual-level Transformation: Personal Change and Peace Processes ..... 61

Chapter 3
Conflict Transformation and the Four Dimensions of Change .......... 65
  3.1. Personal Change ....................................................................... 68
    3.1.a. ‘Finding Emancipation in the Heart of the Enemy’ ...................... 68
    3.1.b. Individual Agency and Power .................................................. 73
    3.1.c. Impact on Career Trajectories ................................................ 76
    3.1.d. Identity Markers and Shifts in Participant Perceptions ................ 80
3.2. Relational Change ........................................................................................................ 91
   3.2.b. Prejudice and Social Distance: Bridging the Divides ............................ 98
   3.2.c. The Other Within .................................................................................. 103
   3.2.d. Commonalities and Differences ........................................................... 104
   3.2.e. Collaborative Explorations: Cross-Border Professional Partnerships ........................................ 109
3.3. Structural Change ................................................................................................. 112
   3.3.a. Impact on Media Reportage and Policy Formulations .......................... 113
   3.3.b. Impact on Educational Institutions ....................................................... 115
3.4. Cultural Change ................................................................................................. 118

Chapter 4
Select Dialogue Themes .................................................................................. 121
   4.1. Gender, Conflict, and Peace ................................................................. 124
   4.3. ‘The Past That Lies Before Us’: Partition Narratives ............................ 140
   4.4. Religion: A Resource for Peace? ......................................................... 148
   4.5. Media and The Peace Process .............................................................. 150
   4.6. Scaling Up: In Search of a South Asian Sensibility ............................... 152

Chapter 5
Challenges, Lessons Learned, and The Way Forward .................................. 157

Concluding Reflections .................................................................................. 179

Annexure 1
Appendices to Theories of Change ............................................................... 187

Annexure 2
Participant Formulations on Jammu and Kashmir ....................................... 193

Annexure 3
WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop Publications ........................ 197

About WISCOMP ............................................................................................... 200
About this Publication

This book shares the findings of a research evaluation that WISCOMP undertook of its decade-long Conflict Transformation Program (2001–2012). The Program brought together 400 youth leaders, primarily from India and Pakistan, for dialogues-cum-trainings in peacebuilding.

The cornerstone of this Program was the weeklong Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop, which provided a unique space for young Indians and Pakistanis to build relationships of trust across the divisions of conflict. Some of these Workshops also included participants from other South Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Over a period of 10 years, these young women and men (in the age-group of 20–35 years) came to the WISCOMP space to meet, learn, and train together. From these dialogues emerged powerful experiences that inspired them to work in support of peace and coexistence efforts between India and Pakistan, as well as in other South Asian contexts. These experiences of reaching out to ‘the other’ and building transformative capacity, as well as the journeys that such encounters initiated, are documented in the pages that follow.

The authors here share WISCOMP’s theories of change, including their own experiences of facilitating these cross-border meetings and the overall outcome, effectiveness, and relevance of the Conflict Transformation Workshops. The study concludes with a summary of the challenges and lessons learned over a decade and offers some suggestions for future peacebuilding initiatives.
Acknowledgments

The Conflict Transformation Program was made possible by a generous 10-year grant from the Government of Finland in 2001. During this period, the Program benefited from the guidance and support of Amb. Benjamin Bassin, Amb. Glen Lindholm, Amb. Asko Numminen, and Amb. Terhi Hakala. The inputs and feedback of First and Second Secretaries Anne Ahonen, Anna-Kaisa Heikkinen, Sanna Selin, and Heli Lehto were most valuable in nurturing and guiding our efforts in training for conflict transformation and coexistence in the South Asian region. We remain indebted to them for their support to this peacebuilding endeavor.

WISCOMP also acknowledges with deep gratitude the support provided by the Ford Foundation, and especially the guidance of Susan Berresford (President, Ford Foundation, New York, 1996–2007), Gowher Rizvi (Ford Foundation Representative, South Asia, 1998–2002), and Bishnu Mohapatra (Governance Program Officer at the Ford Foundation's South Asia office in New Delhi, 2002–2011).

We are deeply grateful to the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of HH the Dalai Lama (FUR) for its vision and unwavering support, and especially to Rajiv Mehrotra (Trustee/Secretary, FUR) for his inspirational leadership and guidance. A special word of thanks to the FUR-WISCOMP staff: Seema Kakran for designing the baseline and endline questionnaires which were an important research tool for this evaluation; Harish Chandra Bhatt and Thupten Tsewang for their administrative and managerial support to this project; and Shilpi Shabdita for help with the collation of the quantitative data. Many thanks also to Sree Kumari and Devender Kumar, for their support in organizing the Conflict Transformation Workshops.

Over the last 10 years, the Conflict Transformation Program has benefited from the expertise of several scholar-practitioners from the South Asian region who have worked with us and have generously shared their expertise and time to further the goals of the Conflict Transformation Program. Although many of them have relocated to different cities, countries, and jobs, we remain indebted to them for their significant contributions to this initiative. Thanks especially to Sumona DasGupta, Stuti Bhatnagar, Soumita Basu, Evelyn Thornton, Deepi Mahajan, and Tonusree Basu, and to the interns and volunteers who helped with the organization of the Annual Workshops.

Last but not least, WISCOMP salutes the courage and commitment of the 400-strong alumni network of young South Asian peace animators who work untiringly to bridge myriad divisions—in their homes, communities, and societies. Over the last 10 years, they have emerged as exemplar role models for other young South Asians to tread the path of conflict transformation and have proved that dialogue and empathy are indeed ‘forces more powerful’.
Introduction

Introduction

The Conflict Transformation Program was conceptualized as part of the efforts of WISCOMP to facilitate trust-building dialogues, peacebuilding trainings, and cross-border professional partnerships between South Asian youth leaders, primarily from India and Pakistan. Informed by a ‘generational’ approach to peacebuilding, the Program sought to create a space—through weeklong Workshops—where young people from across the divisions of conflict could come together to build ‘strategic relationships’ and enhance their capacity to contribute to processes of peacebuilding in the region.

WISCOMP’s theory of change was that sustained face-to-face dialogues between young Indians and Pakistanis along with professional training in the field of conflict transformation can build long-term peace and security. A gender perspective is integral to this process because conflict affects men and women differently, and sustainable peace requires the participation of all stakeholders. The goal, in the initial stages of the Workshop dialogues, was not to arrive at agreement on the issues that divided Indians and Pakistanis, but to change the way they saw each other and interacted with one another. In other words, the idea was not to negotiate on the interests and positions of the two countries, but to build ‘social capital’ to enhance the transformative capacity of young people to dialogue on difficult subjects and to arrive at solutions that were based on the principles of mutual respect and equity.

In this context, the Conflict Transformation Workshops encouraged Indian and Pakistani participants to rise above the ‘baggage’ of preceding generations and to question inherited prejudices about ‘the other’. Through the use of critical thinking tools, a space was created for participants to: interrogate historical narratives in which ‘we were the victims’ and ‘they were the villains’; open worldviews to the diversity that existed in ‘the other’ country; and enhance capacity to form opinions based on the personal experience of interacting with ‘the other’. Seeking to increase the stakes for bilateral peace and broaden the constituencies for reconciliation, the Conflict Transformation Workshops sought to advance the following goals:

---

1 Social capital here refers to the networks of web-like relationships among individuals and institutions, along with associated norms of behavior, trust, and cooperation, which enable a society to function effectively. The assumption is that when people connect and form such relationships, they are more likely to cooperate together to constructively address (and transform) conflict, which in turn can influence processes of social change.
• Reduce prejudice and build trust between the next generation of leaders in India and Pakistan;

• Strengthen their personal motivation and professional capacity to engage in processes of conflict transformation;

• Build ‘strategic relationships’\(^2\) and partnerships for active coexistence;

• Provide dialogic spaces where young people can develop empathy for diverse worldviews and experiences;

• Build a South Asian peacebuilding curriculum that reflects a synergy between theory and practice and which is located at the intersection of gender, security, nonviolence, and conflict transformation.

The Workshops have also attempted to foreground the sensibility that ‘peace begins with the self’. The curriculum includes life philosophies as well as daily hands-on skills that help youth leaders to transcend different kinds of fault-lines to emerge as agents of constructive social change—at the inter-state, intra-state, and community-based levels as well as with respect to conflicts within the home, in neighborhoods, and in organizations.

The WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Program: A Background

The evolution and trajectory of the Conflict Transformation Program (between 2001 and 2012) present a fascinating journey of the exhilaration, fulfillment, and challenges that accompany peacebuilding work. While stories of civil society peacebuilding between India and Pakistan predate the WISCOMP initiative, in the first year of the 21st century, the Conflict Transformation Program was in a sense ‘the only game in town’. This was because it was designed not as a one-off conference or photo-opp, but as part of a decade-long vision to train and empower the youth of India and

\(^2\) According to peacebuilding scholar-practitioners John Paul Lederach and Lisa Schirch, ‘strategic relationships’ are characterized by the presence of trust, empathy for ‘the other’s’ point of view, and a critical engagement with stereotypes. Such relationships are defined as strategic because they have the capacity to initiate new forms of professional, social, economic, and/or political partnerships that can significantly influence broader processes of social change, far greater in impact than similar efforts undertaken by individual entities/organizations. In addition, WISCOMP sees the professional/societal location of such individuals (who build these relationships) as strategic if they are in a position to influence the attitudes and behavior of a larger number of people. For example, school and university-level teachers form a large contingent at the Conflict Transformation Workshops based on WISCOMP’s view that educators have considerable power to shape the attitudes and behaviors of adolescents and young adults, particularly with reference to how they perceive ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ in the context of social and political conflicts.
Pakistan to address conflicts in a more constructive manner and to create safe, catalytic spaces where dialogue could be truly sustained. What follows here is a short description of the Annual Workshops that formed the core of the Program.

The first Workshop, titled *Rehumanizing the Other*, was held in June 2001 in New Delhi. Designed as a ‘peace camp’, it brought together graduate and undergraduate students from India and Pakistan for a first-of-its-kind dialogue-cum-training between the youth of the two countries. The Workshop was held at a time when an articulation of the desire to meet people from ‘the other side’ would invariably be met with surprise and even ridicule. While many of the Pakistani participants had a hard time acquiring parental consent (which was finally given after the assurance that their teachers would be traveling as escorts), the Indian participants faced a barrage of questions as to the efficacy of such meetings and whether they would be able to accomplish anything at all. At this point of time, it was clear that the nuclear tests of 1998 and the Kargil conflict a year later had deepened the distrust between the two sides.

In this context, WISCOMP provided a hitherto unavailable space to which the *third generation* from India and Pakistan could come and dialogue on a range of issues—some dividers, others connectors. This goal of dialogue was intertwined with WISCOMP’s attempt to equip the young leaders with the skills and motivation to work together for reconciliation between the two countries. The Workshop concluded with a

---

3 The students represented Kinnaird College for Women (Lahore), Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (Karachi), Lahore University of Management Sciences (Lahore), University of Peshawar (Peshawar), Lady Shri Ram College for Women (New Delhi), University of Delhi (Delhi), Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi), Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai), and St. Xavier’s College (Mumbai).
Joint Statement on Jammu and Kashmir, which the Indian and Pakistani students drafted, following a negotiation simulation on the conflict.4

Barring a handful of students from Lady Shri Ram College (New Delhi) who had travelled to Kinnaird College (Lahore) as part of a student exchange program in 1999, for the rest of the participants—constituting 92% of the Workshop group—this was their first meeting with ‘the other’. The impact of this meeting was significant because not only did their perceptions and attitudes about ‘the other’ change, but a qualitative shift in their career choices and professional trajectories was also discerned. Even those who went on to pursue careers in finance, management, or medicine sustained the Workshop friendships and attempted to foreground these vocabularies of peace in their own unique ways. For example, a neurosurgeon from Karachi (who was pursuing an MBBS degree when he attended the WISCOMP Workshop) became actively involved with issues concerning ‘peace through healthcare’ and organizations such as the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War–Pakistan.

A few months later, in December 2001, the Indian Parliament was attacked. New Delhi held Islamabad responsible for the attack and suspended diplomatic ties, travel links, and even flying rights over Indian airspace. It launched Operation Parakram, an 11-month-long military build-up on the border with Pakistan. With this, the two countries were enmeshed in a military confrontation involving an estimated half-a-million soldiers facing-off across the border. The situation worsened rapidly and war seemed imminent with politicians talking about how ‘the nation should be prepared for losses and delayed results as the fighting would be fierce’!

Within this political context, it became impossible for WISCOMP to hold the Workshop in 2002. But in the summer of 2003, against heavy odds—financial and political—WISCOMP brought together a group of third generation practitioners and researchers (in the age-group of 21-35 years) for a peacebuilding training titled Transcending Conflict. This act of facilitating contact between young Indians and Pakistanis at a time of intense animosity at the broader political level was based on WISCOMP’s belief that dialogue becomes even more relevant in the wake of conflict; and in the long run, military mobilizations and suspension of talks only exacerbate conflict and take adversaries further away from the goal of conflict resolution.

The challenges that WISCOMP confronted in the months prior to the 2003 Workshop were overwhelming. First, it had to contend with opposition to the very act of inviting Pakistanis to New Delhi at a time when many Indian analysts were still advocating a

---

4 A copy of this Joint Statement is appended in Annexure 2 (page 193). Ironically, the young participants were able to arrive at a consensus that had evaded the political leadership of the two countries at the Agra Summit in July 2001, held a month after the First WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop.
‘preemptive strike’ on Pakistani soil. Second, the task of ensuring that visas came through was arduous, as anticipated. WISCOMP managed to secure visas for 12 Pakistani youth leaders, but not for all who were invited. Yet, given the tense political situation, these 12 visas were seen as a considerable achievement. Third, the financial costs were significant because the suspension of air links between the two countries meant that the Pakistani participants had to travel to India via the UAE. Yet, the fact that the Pakistani delegates were willing to brave family opposition to travel to ‘enemy-land’ and undertake a 22-hour plane journey (which should not have taken more than an hour had there been direct flights) was not lost on any of the Indian participants who attended the dialogue. Workshop participant Nausheen Wasi (Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi) recalls:

*Travelling to the other side of the divide was not only discouraged but considered suspicious as well. 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. Even so, the detour proved useful and marked the beginning of a new realization—at the WISCOMP workshop—of the meaning and benefits of peace...It brought home the realization that people on both sides have a desire to meet each other.*

In addition to the strained relations between India and Pakistan, the 2003 Workshop also took on board the new global and regional scenario, changed forever as a result of 9/11 and the subsequent ‘war on terror’. Recognizing the growing complexity of grievances, fears, and insecurities that the ‘war on terror’ and its backlash had unleashed, the Conflict Transformation Workshop (2003) broadened the canvas of engagement to include issues concerning human rights, justice, reconciliation, the deepening of democracy, and nonviolent methods of waging conflict and reducing violence.

The next Annual Workshop (titled *Dialogic Engagement*) focused on the theme of multi-track diplomacy, bringing to a common space young artists, educators, journalists, NGO workers, business leaders, and researchers from the two countries. Using the lens of multi-track diplomacy which advocates society-
wide ownership of a peace process, this Workshop looked at the interface between governments, political parties, business groups, and the non-governmental tracks of peacebuilding. The engagement moved beyond an understanding of the role of various tracks, and delved into the constraints that different tracks work with and the points at which they intersect. For the first time, a module titled *Kashmir: The Way Forward* was factored into the Workshop curriculum with a purpose to provide a context for Indians, Pakistanis, and Kashmiris to collectively brainstorm mutually acceptable proposals for the transformation of the conflict. Held in 2004, this Workshop was infused with the optimism that the reenergized ‘composite dialogue’ had generated among common people in the two countries. The positive movement at the government level had enabled thousands of Indians and Pakistanis—including many of the WISCOMP Workshop participants—to cross the border for cricket matches and various cultural and educational exchange programs. The highpoint of this coming together of hearts and minds was a particularly evocative banner with the words *Pyaar To Hona Hi Tha* (Love was Inevitable), which was seen on the streets of Lahore in 2004 in response to the Indian cricket team’s maiden victory in Pakistan. Pakistanis celebrated the victory with firecrackers, and later, Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf summarized his own hope with the statement that the peace process was now ‘irreversible’.

Continuing with this hope and momentum, the 2005 Workshop brought together 40 young professionals (including a small group of alumni) for a training in dialogue and leadership models for social change. Titled *Envisioning Futures: Dialogue and Conflict Transformation*, this Workshop explored new models of leadership offered by the fields of conflict resolution and conflict transformation. WISCOMP advanced the view that a new conceptualization of leadership, not linked to ‘conventional positions of power’, was needed in the South Asian region. And this should be reflected in a new generation of leaders who possessed the transformative capacity to generate social change by shifting public consciousness away from fear and hostility and towards coexistence and mutual strength. Emphasizing the need for greater attention to leadership models that could transform seemingly intractable conflicts, Ambassador Ragnar Angeby, Director of the Conflict Prevention in Practice Project at the Folke Bernadotte Academy in Sweden, and plenary speaker at this Workshop, stated:

> A leadership that is rooted in participatory processes offers an open and inclusive space where participants build political processes to address the sources of conflict, develop skills to work with serious controversy, and initiate a process of confidence-building and mutual understanding.

Informed by this sensibility, the 2006 Workshop titled *Collaborative Explorations* brought together a select group of alumni for intensive trainings in transformative
leadership models with a purpose to design a future course for cross-border peace partnerships. Providing the context for a mid-term evaluation of the Conflict Transformation Program, this dialogue also invited the alumni to assess shortcomings, highlight strengths and achievements, and conceptualize an action-plan to set in motion collaborative processes through which they could work together in settings that extended beyond the format and context of the WISCOMP Workshops. The key questions that the alumni thus sought to address at this Workshop were: ‘How can we transform the learnings from previous workshops into cross-border partnerships? And, what impact do we envisage these to have on relations between India and Pakistan?’

This dialogue also witnessed the expression of unbound creativity with respect to the diverse ways in which issues surrounding the Kashmir conflict were addressed. Some of these included formats such as quiz, participant group presentations, film screenings, and photo installations. While the quiz sought to facilitate an appreciation of the multicultural ethos of Jammu and Kashmir through visuals on the region’s people, landscape, languages, cuisine, places of worship, and syncretic spaces, the medium of documentary film was used to capture the contemporary (and complex) realities that have emerged as a result of the armed conflict. Expert panels, participant presentations, and group discussions facilitated engagement with the vocabulary of security, peacebuilding, and new disciplines such as ‘futures studies’. Another exciting addition to this Workshop was the study of diverse international peace accords (and peace processes) to explore creative solutions that transcended the conventional focus on borders and boundaries.

The next Annual Workshop titled Coexistence and Trust-Building: Transforming Relationships looked at the burgeoning literature on ‘trust’ and ‘coexistence’—concepts that are increasingly being seen as central to the sustenance of peace and security in regions torn apart by violent conflict. With the focus squarely on strategies to infuse trust in adversarial relationships, participants looked at different levels of multi-track interaction between the two countries. There was a clear understanding
that the trust deficit between the two countries lay at the root of the bilateral conflicts and that sustained dialogue was the only way to overcome this. In addition, the Workshop included sessions on ‘education for a culture of peace’ and multiculturalism and the role of the media and religious leaders in conflict transformation.

In 2009, as the Conflict Transformation Program entered its eighth year, WISCOMP took the decision to ‘scale up’ the Workshops by diversifying and expanding the demographic profile of the participants as also the issues that formed the agenda of the dialogues. Titled Seeking Peace in Changing Worlds: Conflict Transformation and The New Geopolitics of Power, the Workshop brought together participants from all countries of the South Asian region to address the following issues: the challenges that the ‘war on terror’ has revealed; the geopolitics of peace; the growing power of ‘spoilers’ who have a vested interest in the perpetuation of political/social violence; and the relationship between religion, spirituality, and peace. The decision to ‘scale up’ was based on WISCOMP’s view that while young South Asians are well-versed with the cultures and lifestyles of their peers in Europe and the USA, they know little about their immediate neighbors, and in some cases even harbor prejudices towards them (despite the acknowledgment of a shared history and cultural affinity). Since the Workshop was held a few months after the Mumbai terror attacks (in November 2008), a space was provided for the Indian and Pakistani participants to jointly engage in a dispassionate understanding of the root causes of terror. No doubt, the post-Mumbai scenario presented new challenges to conflict transformation efforts between India and Pakistan. Even though cross-border relationships built at the Workshops endured the Mumbai attacks, there was a renewed hostility outside the WISCOMP network.5

5 For example, the Pew Global Attitudes Survey of 2009 revealed that 69% of the Pakistani respondents saw India as a bigger threat than the Taliban (57%) or the Al-Qaeda (41%). Today, this perception stands substantially modified in Pakistan as the country faces unprecedented threats from terror and militancy within its own territory.
The engagement with broader South Asian issues continued at the next Annual Workshop in 2010, which was titled *Enriching Democratic Practice in South Asia: Possibilities from the Field of Peacebuilding*. This Workshop sought to build on a unique opportunity, which was that all countries of the South Asian region were (at that time) ruled by democratically elected governments. In this context, it looked at the complex relationship between democracy and peacebuilding, exploring in particular the challenges of ‘embedding’ democracy in societies coded as post-conflict. This Workshop also took on board the growing international concern that the field of peacebuilding was not living up to the transformative goals it professed, reflected in the surprisingly large number of ‘post-conflict’ societies that were relapsing into violence. In this context, the tenuous transitions from violence to peace in countries such as Afghanistan and Nepal were discussed extensively.

The 2011 Workshop titled *Gender, Democracy, and Peacebuilding in South Asia* continued with this broader engagement with South Asian issues and the challenges emanating from the interface between processes of democracy, conflict, and the delivery of justice. Although the cross-country conversations were a big takeaway for many of the participants, WISCOMP observed that, often, bilateral issues would come in the way of forging a South Asian sensibility. For example, although there was the expectation that the differing views of the Indian and Pakistani participants would pose a challenge, WISCOMP was surprised at the hostility between the Afghan and Pakistani participants whose conflicting narratives collided frequently at the Workshop discussions. At some moments, this collision was so intense that Workshop resource persons felt the need to address these issues in caucus and through one-on-one meetings between participants representing these countries. This experience also made WISCOMP do a rethink on the timing of the decision to ‘scale up’ because it became increasingly evident that intense and sustained bilateral dialogues should precede the regional dialogues. This Workshop also witnessed a more focused dialogue on how gender identity influenced the experiences of men and women, not just in situations of armed conflict but also with respect to everyday conflicts within the four walls of the home and the workplace. In this context, Workshop participants reflected on their own notions of masculinity and femininity and how, often, they unwittingly become part of cultural processes that further patriarchy.

Based on the experience of the 2011 Workshop, the next Annual Workshop (in 2012) titled *The Software of Peacebuilding* returned the focus to India–Pakistan relations, bringing to the dialogue space 38 ‘next generation’ leaders from the two countries. While Kashmiris have formed a large sub-group at all previous dialogues, the 2012 Workshop was unique in the sense that it brought together stakeholders from both sides of the Line of Control, cutting across the religious and ethnic diversity of the
region that was once the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Looking at the diverse ways in which ordinary citizens can contribute to the bilateral peace process and make it truly ‘irreversible’, this Workshop was also a ‘homecoming’ of sorts with a good number of alumni returning to the WISCOMP space to share their experiences of building bridges and ideas on how cross-border partnerships could be strengthened.

This dialogue in 2012 marked the conclusion of one important phase of the Conflict Transformation Workshops. In the chapters that follow, the Workshops are evaluated with reference to the change processes that they initiated at the personal, relational, structural, and cultural levels. However, before engaging with these levels of change, we present here a profile of the youth leaders who participated in the dialogues and the pedagogy that WISCOMP used to facilitate these meetings.

**Participant Profiles**

Between 2001 and 2012, WISCOMP organized 10 Annual Conflict Transformation Workshops, which brought together 400 youth leaders from the South Asian region. Each Workshop consisted of about 40 women and men (in the age group of 20 to 35 years). Since the Workshops were conceptualized primarily to facilitate processes of conflict transformation between India and Pakistan, the majority of participants represented these two countries (with delegates from the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir constituting a sizable sub-group).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male-Female Composition of the CT Workshops</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female participants</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male participants</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WISCOMP invested considerable time and energy into the process through which Workshop participants were selected. It identified those individuals who demonstrated the capacity (or potential) to work for constructive social change—whether by engaging with key political/security actors or with micro/macro communities within their circles of influence. It serves little purpose to have just ‘feel-good workshops’ with people who go back to their jobs and families with little or no motivation or power to affect social change. The multi-stage selection process was, therefore, designed to identify those young leaders who had demonstrated transformational

---

6 The duration of each Workshop varied between seven to ten days. Owing to funding constraints, Workshops in recent years were spread over a period of five days, although, often, the majority of participants would stay on in Delhi at their own expense to continue the dialogue.

7 Since participants came from both sides of the Line of Control, WISCOMP has retained the terminology they used while referring to the different parts of Jammu and Kashmir.
Note:
*The representation of participants from the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir as a separate category has not been done to endorse or refute political positions. Rather, the purpose is to note that this group sees its identity and the conflict in very different ways, and there is a need to recognize this. Participants represented both the Indian and Pakistani sides of Jammu and Kashmir. On the Indian side, they came from Jammu, the Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh. On the Pakistani side, they came from Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, and Rawalakot.
leadership potential as well as the ability to build relationships across fault-lines. WISCOMP also made an effort, during the advertising and screening process, to access individuals who represented the diversity that exists in India and Pakistan—not just in terms of religion, geography or ethnicity, but also with respect to personal experiences, political/ideological perspectives, belief systems, and worldviews. This was based on the theoretical assumption that negative stereotyping becomes harder when individuals are presented with a diversity of views and lifestyles from ‘the other’ side.

The Workshops attracted large numbers of participants from regions affected by the violence surrounding the 1947 partition of the subcontinent. They came from families who were forced to migrate to ‘the other side’ of the Radcliffe Line and whose lives changed forever as a result of the violence and displacement they experienced during those turbulent times. The Indian and Pakistani participants who came from such families represented the third and fourth generations; yet they bore the scars of the trauma that their parents and grandparents had lived with since 1947. For them, the opportunity to participate in the WISCOMP dialogue marked an important stage in their personal journeys to engage with the stories of displacement and loss (that formed an important part of their family’s identity narrative) as well as to meet with those perceived as ‘the other’. Yet, since ‘the other’ represented a place from which their own family drew its roots and sense of identity, there was also a deep curiosity to engage and learn. For this group of participants, the WISCOMP Workshop was a space they came to in order to fulfill these expectations and, equally significant, to search for family homes and ancestral burial sites. In so doing, they became the only representatives of their families, in over 60 years, to visit ‘home’. Although this group of participants did not have a direct experience of violence, their families’ pain and trauma had considerably influenced their identities as well as their perceptions about ‘the enemy’ and the conflict between India and Pakistan.

A second group of participants came to the Workshops with a direct experience of socio-political violence. While the majority came from Jammu and Kashmir (on both sides of the LoC), the Workshop also attracted several participants from regions experiencing other forms of state and non-state violence—for example, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan (in Pakistan) and Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, and Gujarat (in India).

A third group of participants represented ostensibly peaceful cities such as New Delhi and Lahore. Yet, it would be incorrect to assume that they came from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds and hence had no exposure to violence. On the contrary,

---

8 In order to retain continuity and sustain post-Workshop dialogues, about 25% of the participants from one Workshop would return the following year to attend the next Workshop.
the stories of violence they brought to the Workshop space challenged many theoretical assumptions about the linkages between education, economic privilege, peace, and security. Often, these were stories of gender-based violence, and caste-based and religion-based discrimination in different spheres, including the home, the workplace, and broader social contexts.

Some of the Workshops also brought together participants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka with a purpose to explore the possibilities of building a South Asian sensibility and enhancing regional cooperation. In addition to providing an enabling context for them to engage with each other’s worldviews and collectively build conflict transformation capacity, the Workshops invited these young South Asian leaders to share their proposals for the transformation of the conflict between India and Pakistan, which has served as a barrier to regional peace and cooperation.

While participants represented different cultural and political backgrounds as well as diverse professions such as law, psychology, conflict resolution, advocacy, education, theology, media, business, medicine, development, public policy, and the arts, they came together for a common purpose: to build their capacity to reduce human suffering and contribute to sustainable peace and security in the South Asian region.

**Refugee Voices:** The Workshops also included the participation of Afghan, Burmese, and Tibetan youth. These young participants enriched the Conflict Transformation dialogues, adding new layers of perspectives to the complex task of building sustainable peace. They helped to bring forth the recognition that the displaced not only have special needs, but they are also particularly vulnerable to violence. Displacement breaks up families and severs community ties. It leads to unemployment and limits access to land, education, food, and shelter. However, the vulnerabilities and aspirations of each community are different. While the majority of the Afghan participants have now returned to their country to assist in reconstruction efforts, this is not an option open to Tibetan and Burmese youth, owing primarily to concerns about their security. Even though they have better access to education, employment, and housing in India, they are under pressure to assimilate, creating conflicts of choice and identity. These new voices have also pointed to the need for greater focus on processes of participatory democracy, pluralism, and active coexistence in the region.

---

9 See Page 17 for the geographical representation of participants who attended the Conflict Transformation Workshops.

10 See Page 20 for information on the professions/disciplines that the Workshop participants represented.
Professional Profiles of the Participants

- School teachers and principals
- College/university teachers
- Peacebuilding practitioners, trainers, facilitators
- Marketing and finance consultants
- Activists
- Participants pursuing Masters’ and PhD degrees
- Researchers/writers
- INGO/NGO practitioners
- Broadcast/print journalists
- Performing artists
- Film directors, scriptwriters, advertising professionals
- Editors
- Lawyers
- Doctors
- Computer scientists
- Psychologists/Counselors
- Politicians
- Army officers
- Government officials
- Former militants

Notes:

*College/university teachers*: representing disciplines such as history, defense studies, conflict resolution, peace studies, anthropology, social welfare, international relations, political science, psychology, and media and communication studies.
Activists: working in the areas of peacebuilding, human rights, and justice delivery.

Participants pursuing Masters’ and PhD degrees: in areas such as sociology, anthropology, regional security, nonviolent action, sustainable development, history, Hindu-Muslim relations, peace and conflict studies, women’s movements, and conflict resolution.

Researchers/writers: their thematic foci have included security, peace and conflict studies, public policy, development, international relations, energy, climate change, women’s roles in peacebuilding, women in politics, human security, cultural diplomacy, conflict resolution and conflict transformation, civil-military relations in conflict zones, disarmament studies, education policy, peace education, multitrack diplomacy, South Asian politics, geopolitics of the Indian Ocean region, and religious extremism.

INGO/NGO practitioners: their thematic foci have included governance, gender and violence, education, conflict-sensitive development, humanitarian assistance, displacement, rehabilitation, human development, finance and management, child rights, psychosocial health, youth leadership for social change, mediation, disaster management, development communication, inter-community relations, and democracy movements.

Government officials: have represented the departments/ministries of internal security, foreign affairs, information and broadcasting, public diplomacy, and education.

The pictures here capture the diversity of participants that WISCOMP has brought together for dialogues in a space of trust.

Mr. Akhter Hussain (a Jammu-based high-school teacher and former militant who renounced violence in the 1990s to work in support of communal harmony in J&K),

Mr. Ishtiaq Ahmed Dev (a Doda-based social worker and former militant), and

Mr. Shahnawaz Choudhary (State President of the Youth Congress for Jammu and Kashmir, Doda) brainstorm on peacebuilding strategies in Kashmir.

Ms. Farhat Asif (President, Institute of Peace and Diplomacy, Islamabad) and Ms. Khushboo Jain (Consultant, National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, New Delhi) share experiences of grassroots peace activism in Pakistan and India.
Civilian-Military Profiles: While only 5% of the Indian participants had served in the military, 11% came from families where a parent, sibling, or spouse had worked in the armed forces. In comparison, all the participants from Pakistan were civilians (with no history of military service). Yet, a good number of them—constituting 44% of the total number of Pakistani participants—represented families where an immediate member had served in the armed forces. It is instructive to note here that several Pakistani participants talked about how their fathers (who had served in the military) had nudged them to choose civilian professions such as journalism, development, and teaching, and had even encouraged them to travel to India for the Conflict Transformation Workshops.

WISCOMP did not receive applications from young Pakistanis who had served in the military; while the percentage of Indian applicants with a history of military service was very small (5%). This could mean that the Workshop outreach was limited to civilians. Or, it could also be that young army officers (particularly in Pakistan) saw the Workshop advertisement, but chose not to apply for the dialogue.

Dilution of the Peace Energy: A tabulation of the current geographical location of the Workshop alumni revealed that 12% of them have migrated to countries outside the South Asian region in search of better jobs, lifestyles, and even security. They have been quite candid about the reasons for doing so. For example, some Pakistani alumni referred to the deteriorating security situation in their country as a prime motivator to travel to other countries in search of a safer home for their family and better livelihood options. Nadia Umar, a Pakistani dentist now living in Australia (and alumnus of the 2003 Workshop), shared the following sentiment with WISCOMP in 2008:

Although future generations will be able to approach the situation differently, it is rather debatable how our generation will do this. Unfortunately, most of our educated youth tend to migrate to foreign countries to establish their own futures. Hence, there are fewer people who will presumably come back, enter politics, and address the political ties between India and Pakistan.

Indians too have referred to the attraction of better-paying jobs and easier lifestyles in the Western countries. A participant from Afghanistan, who lost her father to political violence in Kandahar and took the decision to live in the USA, referred to the fear of losing other family members and also expressed a sense of hopelessness about the deteriorating security situation in her country. This view was shared by other participants from Afghanistan as well.

Although the personal change that these participants underwent at the Workshop has sustained—and so have the cross-border friendships—their ability to impact policy and social change processes in their communities and countries is now limited.
Yet, in their communication to WISCOMP, some talked about the positive role that they, as part of the South Asian diaspora, could play in influencing regional politics and peacebuilding processes. Many also shared that they continue to use the skills of conflict transformation (such as active listening and dialogue) learnt at the WISCOMP Workshops, to improve relationships at the personal and professional levels.

**Workshop Pedagogy**

Informed by a pedagogy that views personal experience, critical thinking, contemplation, and action as important fulcrums of education, the Conflict Transformation Workshops encouraged participatory and practice-based processes of learning. Through the use of diverse methodologies such as cross-community and cross-cultural dialogues, games, film appreciation sessions, roundtables, lectures, role-plays, simulations, panel and group discussions, and creative forms of expression such as theater, music, and art, the Workshops sought to increase the participants’ capacity for imaginative thinking and empathy—closely holding together the cyclical relationship between ‘reflection and action’.¹¹ Most significantly, through these processes, participants were invited to enter the lived reality of their adversaries to understand their culture, worldview, and daily strivings.

The Conflict Transformation Workshops were also influenced by the writings of Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire and the ‘popular education’ movement, which emphasize the creation of a mutual learning community where each individual, by sharing his/her own experiences and resources, enhances the process of learning. Conflict Transformation scholar John Paul Lederach summarizes the key principles of this ‘pedagogy’ in the following words:

> Popular education promotes change both in social and educational systems. It is centered on the concept of conscientization—the process of building awareness of self-in-context that produces individual growth and social change. Popular education is a process of mutuality—student and teacher discover and learn together through reflection and action, which are kept in direct relationship as the root of learning and transformation…Posing problems relative to real-life situations and challenges rather than providing prescriptions about those situations are important pedagogical tools.²²

¹¹ While the plenaries and panel discussions offered a more in-depth understanding of South Asian history, politics, media, religion, economics, and literature, the role-plays and simulations helped participants to develop trust and empathy with ‘the other’ and increased their motivation to stay connected through a wider web of relationships built at the Workshops.

Drawing on this pedagogy, WISCOMP saw participants as resources, not recipients, believing that they learn as much from what they are taught in a Workshop setting as from the lived experiences of those they meet at such dialogues and from their own reflection on such encounters. Participants were encouraged to share their own experiences, and knowledge to enhance the collective learning process. This approach was based on the assumption that solutions drawn from indigenous knowledge and from the participants’ own lived realities will be more sustainable in the long run, primarily because they empower individuals to trust their own ability to transcend violence. WISCOMP, therefore, used a ‘bottom-up’, ‘multi-track’ approach where the process of peacebuilding was driven by the participants of the Conflict Transformation Workshops. Each Workshop was located at the intersection of theory and practice, and with the specific purpose to bridge the worlds of politics, policymaking, academia, advocacy, media, business, civil society, and grassroots peacebuilding. The diversity in the participants’ and resource persons’ professional backgrounds further facilitated these multi-track dialogues, particularly between traditional security establishments and those representing the media, business, and civil society. In addition, an attempt was made to have an Indian and a Pakistani co-teach or co-facilitate some of the sessions so that the collaborative aspect of the dialogue could deepen.

In this context, dialogue was emphasized as a preferred methodology to reduce prejudice and build common ground among the participants. To WISCOMP, it was clear that the pedagogy that trainers used to transact the course in the classroom must be consistent with the methodology we espoused for the transformation of violence in divided societies. Dialogue is in fact central to conflict transformation efforts because, as Lederach puts it, ‘Many of the skill-based mechanisms that are called upon to reduce violence are rooted in the communicative abilities to exchange ideas, find common definitions to issues, and seek ways forward toward solutions.’ In such a process, adversaries not only share their feelings, but listen deeply to each other and make a genuine effort to cultivate empathy for worldviews and experiences different from their own. WISCOMP has found the following definition of dialogue by Harold Saunders13 helpful in its facilitation of conflict transformation processes between young Indians and Pakistanis:

*Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take others’ concerns into her or his own picture,*

---

13 Harold Saunders is Founder of the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue and Former Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, U.S. State Department, Washington DC.
Communication methods that engaged participants’ whole selves, beyond the cerebral, were also emphasized. This was based on research that shows that about 60% of our communication is non-verbal. Verbal conversations can be limiting in encounters with ‘the other’ in ways that tools such as theater, music, and art are not. The methodology of theater was, in particular, used extensively. WISCOMP experimented with different modes of interactive and improvised theater, which had demonstrated their effectiveness in nonviolent struggles for justice, healing, and reconciliation. In this context, the Theater of the Oppressed and its sub-sets, which include Image Theater, Playback Theater, and Forum Theater, were used at the Conflict Transformation Workshops. The theater sessions also served as ‘ice-breakers’, helping participants to shed inhibitions and negative stereotypes and forge a deeper understanding of one another. Many of the theater activities were designed to help participants ‘live through the experience of the enemy’ and to understand what it means to ‘step into the shoes of the other’. The evaluation study, in fact, revealed that sessions which used theater as a methodology for dialogue received fairly high rankings. Reflecting on their experiences of participating in one such session, Indian Workshop alumni Anisha


15 Drawing on the writings of Paulo Freire in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Brazilian theater director Augusto Boal developed Theater of the Oppressed as a method through which issues of social justice and political rights could be addressed in his country. In an effort to transform theater from the ‘monologue’ of traditional performance into a ‘dialogue’ between audience and stage, Boal experimented with many kinds of interactive theater. His explorations were based on the assumption that all human beings desire and are capable of dialogue, and when a dialogue becomes a monologue, oppression ensues. Theater then becomes a tool for advocating equality and justice in a society.
Kinra and Seema Sridhar said, ‘These 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.’

Another significant aspect of the Workshop pedagogy was that WISCOMP perceived the dialogue as a continual process that went beyond the four walls of the room where the training took place. While not seeking to diminish the impact of the theorizing and strategizing that took place during the Workshop, WISCOMP was conscious of the learning that continued with every conversation and social experience outside the ‘classroom’—during heritage walks, joint sightseeing trips, and shopping expeditions. Post-session evening activities were therefore organized to deepen the social interaction among participants and to provide a context for them to absorb the rich cultural heritage they shared. In addition, one day of the Workshop calendar was left open for the Indian and Pakistani participants to jointly visit media houses, university campuses, thinks-tanks, NGO offices, and sites of common social and cultural interest. Often, it was during these moments that participants lowered their guard in the face of complete exhilaration in each other’s company. Evelyn Thornton, a WISCOMP volunteer (and now Chief Executive Officer with The Institute for Inclusive Security, Washington D.C.), recalls:

[While] we offered theoretical tools for conflict analysis, diplomacy, and reconciliation…but really, it was while singing common folk songs en route to the Taj Mahal, while walking together through Delhi’s awe-inspiring Jama Masjid and sharing mounds of kebabs at the Karim’s restaurant, that stereotypes of the Pakistani ‘terrorist’ and Indian ‘aggressor’ faded. Participants, me included, developed life-long bonds with one another and made commitments to improve relations between our countries.

Since the Conflict Transformation Workshops were residential, WISCOMP organized the accommodation in such a way that a Pakistani and an Indian participant shared a room. This enabled them to have conversations that went beyond the subjects discussed at the Workshop and to understand each other’s worldviews at a much deeper level. Reflecting on this experience, Maria Saifuddin Effendi, Assistant Professor, Peace and Conflict Studies, National Defense University, Islamabad, said, ‘This experience of living together provided 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.'\textsuperscript{17} Her Indian roommate Anuradha Choudry who is now a Research Associate with The Center for Indian Psychology, Jain University, Bangalore, added: ‘When one actually lives and interacts closely with another person, one realizes how unfounded most of our prejudices are.'\textsuperscript{18}

The Conflict Transformation Workshops were an experiment in testing the power of human contact to enable individuals from across the divisions of conflict to build ‘strategic relationships’ for peacebuilding. What follows is an empirical study and exploration of the different levels of change—personal, professional, institutional, and cultural—that the Conflict Transformation Workshops initiated.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{images}
\caption{Indian and Pakistani students at the First Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop in June 2001. Although they met ‘the other’ for the first time at this Workshop, these young leaders made great strides in reaching out across fault-lines and building trusting relationships. While Mehlqa Samdani (from Pakistan) and Sahana Dharmapuri (from India) worked together to design and co-teach a module on dialogue at this First Workshop in 2001 (left picture), Annette Phillip (from India) and Jehanzeb Sherwani (from Pakistan) co-created a ‘song for peace’ (right picture). Today, these young trailblazers have emerged as role models for new forms of leadership in their chosen areas of work. Taking forward the learnings from this Workshop, Mehlqa is now Director at Critical Connections (a Massachusetts-based organization that works to improve understanding of the Muslim world and the Muslim diaspora through analysis and outreach); Sahana is based in Washington DC where she is a gender advisor providing policy advice and training on gender, peace, and security issues to USAID, NATO, USIP, and other national and international organizations; Annette records and performs with her own jazz fusion ensemble, The Annette Philip Quintet and is also a Faculty Member at the Voice Department at Berklee College of Music, Boston; and Jehanzeb Sherwani is CEO and Co-Founder at Screenhero, a San Francisco-based computer software company.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{17} Maria Saifuddin Effendi, ‘No Longer Anonymous’, \textit{Closer to Ourselves} (New Delhi: WISCOMP, 2008), p.25.

\textsuperscript{18} Anuradha Choudry, Workshop Feedback Form (2005).
Research Methodology

The reflections and feedback of the 400 youth leaders who participated in the Conflict Transformation Workshops between 2001 and 2012 form the primary source of research for this evaluation. This study draws on the ‘theories of change’ framework offered by John Paul Lederach, Reina Neufeldt, and Hal Culbertson in Reflective Peacebuilding: A Planning, Monitoring, and Learning Toolkit. Engaging with their emphasis on the different dimensions of constructive social change—personal, relational, structural, and cultural—and measures to sustain these in the long-run, it examines the peacebuilding impact of WISCOMP’s decade-long India-Pakistan Conflict Transformation Program.

The research was conducted with the aid of multiple methods, using inputs gathered from diverse sources. These included the following:

Evaluation and feedback reports: The evaluation reports of the 10 Conflict Transformation Workshops were used extensively to identify outcomes, lessons learnt, and challenges. The participant feedback forms, on which these reports were based, were thoroughly scrutinized and scanned by WISCOMP. Those participants who chose to reveal their identity on these forms have been quoted here.

Workshop narrative reports: The Workshop background papers and concept notes written by the WISCOMP team as well as the proceedings of the 10 annual dialogues were examined. This was done with a purpose to look at the ways in which participants engaged with the ebb and flow of India-Pakistan relations and their own perceptions of the root causes of conflict and advocacy of proposals for sustainable peace and security. In addition, the narrative reports were helpful in capturing the broad landscape of subjects that were addressed at the Workshops and in gauging if the participants responded to these with a distinct sensibility.

Stories from the journey towards peace: Although WISCOMP designed the Workshops on the idea that they would initiate journeys of trust-building and dialogue between young women and men from India and Pakistan, it wanted to engage further with the various dimensions of change—what was the nature of the change that participants experienced; at what level did this take place; was this sustained in the months and years after the WISCOMP dialogues; did it transform into a cross-border partnership; what was the impact of this change on the broader peace process? In 2008, WISCOMP invited Workshop alumni to use the tool of personal storytelling to encapsulate the ways in which the cross-border dialogues-cum-trainings had impacted their lives as also those of the individuals and communities who were within the alumna’s circle of influence. This led to the publication of a book titled Closer to
Ourselves—a collaborative storytelling project, documenting experiences and change processes far more powerful than WISCOMP had envisioned. The book showcased the stories of 55 alumni, capturing their experiences of personal change and social transformation, and illustrating the power of human contact to motivate individuals to work for peace and coexistence. These stories were examined for the endline evaluation. Since they have been published in *Closer to Ourselves*, WISCOMP has not concealed the identity of the authors when referring to their experiences.

**Semi-structured, open-ended baseline and endline questionnaires**: WISCOMP designed a pre-Workshop and post-Workshop questionnaire (incorporating both quantitative and qualitative parameters), which it circulated among the participants over a period of six years (2007–2013). In addition, endline questionnaires were sent to the alumni of earlier Workshops, held between 2001 and 2006. Formulated to gauge the effectiveness of WISCOMP’s conflict transformation efforts, the questions sought to garner both qualitative and quantitative data on a range of issues, including identity, democracy, India-Pakistan relations, peacebuilding, and, perceptions of ‘the other’. For example, the endline questionnaire surveyed participants on their experiences of being part of a cross-border dialogue. Did they encounter stereotypes? If yes, what were these and how did they respond? Did their identities collide with those of other participants at the Workshop? How did they assess others’ behavior towards them? How did participation in the WISCOMP Workshops impact their personal and professional choices? Were the skill-building sessions useful? Were the relationships built at the Workshops helpful in influencing broader change processes?

A primary purpose of this survey was to understand the different levels at which the Workshops influenced the participants, particularly with respect to their beliefs about ‘the other’ and whether any changes in attitudes and behavior could be discerned, as a result. In this context, while the baseline questionnaire quizzed participants on their perceptions of Indians and Pakistani, the endline questionnaire included a ‘social distance survey’ where the purpose was to understand how participants saw their peers who represented different communities and nationalities. Since the questionnaires included open-ended questions, they proved to be a rich source of narratives of change, with participants sharing their reflections on different aspects of the Workshop experience.

A total of 100 participants (out of a sample size of 250) returned the questionnaires to WISCOMP. While 68 of them completed both the baseline and endline questionnaires, 32 participated only in the endline study. Fifty-two of the respondents were Pakistani and 48 Indian. Among the Pakistani participants, 30 were women and 22 men. With respect to the Indian respondents, 27 were women and 21 men. With a view to enable participants to be forthright in their responses, the entire process was
confidential. Respondents were therefore *not asked* to identify themselves in the questionnaires.

The questionnaires have been used to augment the qualitative analysis based on other sources of data and, therefore, should not be seen as a stand-alone source for drawing inferences. The data generated from these questionnaires is appended in Annexure 1.

*Other sources:* Conversations among the alumni (and with WISCOMP) via emails and on social networking sites have also been referred to with the purpose to examine perceptions on current political issues and their relationship with the Workshop dialogues. Particular attention has been given to the metaphors and symbols used by the alumni, and the similar or different ways in which these were interpreted. For instance, did these metaphors, symbols, and even narratives change as a result of the Workshops; did their understanding of what is real and what is mythical change in any way?
Chapter 1

Young professionals from India and Pakistan 'meet' each other and participate in ice-breakers on the first day of the Workshops.
34 Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding for a New Generation
Chapter 1
The First Encounter:
Meeting the Other in a Space of Trust

In the initial years of the Conflict Transformation Program (2001–2008), one factor that WISCOMP took into consideration while designing the Workshops was that, on an average, about 70 to 80 percent of the participants had never met their counterpart from across the border. The avenues for interaction between Indians and Pakistanis were severely limited and the number of Workshop applicants who had traveled to ‘the other’ country and experienced its culture first-hand was miniscule. Even among those who did have the opportunity to meet ‘the other’, this encounter invariably took place in the USA or Europe at conferences and graduate study centers. The conversations in these contexts were limited to the ‘safe topics’ of food, culture, music, and cinema. Neither side wanted to risk the cross-border friendship by broaching the myriad issues that divided the two countries.

In this context, the WISCOMP Workshops provided a unique physical space where young Indians and Pakistanis could, for the first time, enter into a genuine dialogue on difficult subjects and engage with differing narratives and worldviews. Although the invitation to enter this physical space—not on offer to earlier generations—was unique and, as WISCOMP realized, much in demand, equally important were the psychological and social spaces that the Workshops provided to the participants. The psychological safety of the dialogue space was particularly significant as it enabled participants to share their fears, aspirations, and vulnerabilities without inhibition. This space also offered participants a unique opportunity to listen, to understand, to learn, and to thereby build bridges across the ‘great divide’. It was, therefore, in this space that participants took their first tentative steps in long journeys towards change: while some were deeply personal quests, others explored the vast and often complex landscape of relational and social change.

These journeys were in sharp contrast to the conversations that would ensue in the initial sessions of the Workshop. At the Workshop, we spoke our mind—without fear or favour, without restrictions or inhibitions. But more importantly, we gave ‘the other’ equal space and time to be heard as well. We listened with respect to ‘the other’ side’s narrative. This made the dialogue truly meaningful.

Kamran Rehmat
Islamabad-based Journalist
Currently Community Editor, The Gulf Times, Qatar
(Alumnus, 2006 Workshop)
It was often observed, at these sessions, that although the participants were meeting their counterparts from across the border for the first time, they came to the dialogue armed with ‘information’—invariably negative and incorrect—about the wrongs committed by ‘the other’ country. At moments such as this, the divisive role played by the media, the political class, and the education systems would emerge starkly. Sharing his views on this subject, a political and security analyst from Islamabad (who attended the 2011 Workshop titled *Gender, Democracy, and Peacebuilding in South Asia*) stated,

> Given the lack of an enabling environment and opportunities to interact, we are held hostage to the textual frames of history. However, when an opportunity presents itself, the humanization process begins with the ‘culture shock’ of getting to know that ‘the other’ is not as bad as the narrative preached. This helps to overcome boundaries and form lasting bonds.

This is, however, not to suggest that the Conflict Transformation Workshops were the only context for young Indians and Pakistanis to meet. By the mid-2000s, like-minded civil society organizations and educational institutions in the two countries had begun to offer similar spaces for cross-border dialogue. The increase in the number of such initiatives was also a consequence of the progress made by the two governments to increase people-to-people contact—one of the subjects of the track one level composite dialogue. As a result, at its 2009 Workshop, WISCOMP observed that about 55% of the participants *did* have some experience of interacting with ‘the other’, although by now, the Mumbai terror attacks (2008) had taken place and the peace process was faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Even though there were other opportunities available to Indians and Pakistanis (from 2004 onwards) to meet one another in the subcontinent, what set apart the WISCOMP Workshops was the ‘space of trust’ they offered to participants: a space where difficult issues such as Kashmir and terrorism were discussed in a non-judgmental way to search for mutually inclusive solutions; a space where friendships and cross-border partnerships were built, even as participants acknowledged and respected the differences in opinions; and most significantly, a space to which they could return to reenergize and replenish themselves. Alumni have, in fact, often made reference to ‘the reassuring sense of shared spaces’ that the Workshops have come to symbolize. For example, Smriti Vij, a Mumbai-based filmmaker and scriptwriter who participated in the 2001 and 2003 Workshops, wrote the following note to WISCOMP in 2008: ‘The Conflict Transformation Workshop space has created a sense of belonging to something beyond home.’
This unique ‘space of trust’ that the Workshops provided for the initiation of change, at both the personal and relational levels, was in fact a theme that a large number of alumni foregrounded in their feedback. For example, Ouseph Tharakan, a Project Officer with the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, Singapore (and alumnus of the 2004 Workshop titled Dialogic Engagement) shared the following with WISCOMP:

The Workshop was a life-changing experience for most of us. Though we felt we were open-minded individuals even before the meeting, most of us had some reservations and apprehensions of ‘the other’. By providing a space for genuine dialogue, the Workshop challenged these myths even as it enabled us to speak openly and frankly. While one of the greatest accomplishments of the Workshop was that it succeeded in humanizing ‘the other’, its impact will be far-reaching because it built trust between the leaders and policymakers of the future.

The very fact that a space was created for young Indians and Pakistanis to meet on a regular basis, even if only once a year, was perceived by alumni (and even resource persons) as a huge achievement in itself. In a situation where visas were hard to come by and the paperwork so arduous that many applicants would give up midway, the uniqueness of this space was underscored by all who came in contact with the WISCOMP Workshops.
An equally significant dimension that made this space unique was that processes of prejudice reduction and relationship-building were meshed with capacity-building and formal trainings in the field of peacebuilding. Till the mid-to-late 2000s, WISCOMP was perhaps the only organization in the region that offered a structured training in conflict transformation and peacebuilding to youth leaders from India and Pakistan. In fact, even as recent as the 2012 Workshop, 57% of the Pakistani delegates and 59% of the Indian delegates had not participated in any ‘peace and conflict studies’ program prior to the WISCOMP dialogue.

Finally, by transforming into a virtual forum after the weeklong dialogue, these spaces have enabled the conversations to flow outside and beyond the Workshop sessions, and have thus emerged as nurseries for personal change and for the building of trusting relationships across different fault-lines. WISCOMP, in fact, sees the creation of such spaces where ‘next generation’ Indian and Pakistani leaders can come together to build their capacity for sustainable peace as an important advocacy strategy for social change both within and between India and Pakistan.
Chapter 2

Workshop trainer Ms. Ancil Adrian Paul (Gender Adviser and Director of Manna Consulting, London) facilitates a session on Gender and Peacebuilding at the First India-Pakistan Conflict Transformation Workshop held in 2001; Ms. Dilrukshi Fonseka (a conflict resolution and transitional justice practitioner from Colombo) coaches participants in Dialogue and Negotiation skills at the Third Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop in 2004; Ms. Sakshi Kharbanda (a Delhi-based research scholar working on microfinance models) presents the recommendations of her group to enhance cross-border collaborations and inclusive growth in India and Pakistan at the Tenth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop held in 2012; and Afghan and Burmese participants at the 2010 Workshop which focused on issues of democratic transition, governance, and peacebuilding in South Asia.
40 Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding for a New Generation
Chapter 2
Theories of Change

Three fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings in the world will disappear, if we step into the shoes of the adversaries and understand their standpoint.

Mohandas Gandhi

This Chapter encapsulates WISCOMP’s perspective and approach to change that influenced the design and agenda of its Conflict Transformation Workshops. It draws on the evaluation reports of each Workshop, the reflection essays and personal stories that participants sent to WISCOMP (in the months and years) after the dialogues, and the qualitative and quantitative data from the baseline and endline studies to investigate whether these theoretical assumptions were validated; and if so, to what extent.

WISCOMP conceptualized the Conflict Transformation Program drawing on a particular understanding of peacebuilding. It chose the term ‘conflict transformation’ to define its cross-border dialogues-cum-trainings in the belief that trust- and relationship-building between the next generation of leaders and opinion-shapers—across the vertical and horizontal divisions of society—are vital to institutional transformation and to the realization of peace and security in the region. It is only when individuals (from across the conflict divide) deeply listen to ‘the other’ and enter into the ‘counter-fear’ of ‘the other’ that they are able to empathize with perspectives different from their own and

---

19 Peacebuilding, a concept that gained prominence after the UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, used it in his *Agenda for Peace* in 1992, has come to be seen as a catch-all term to refer to diverse processes related to efforts to prevent and reduce violence and build peace. No longer seen as a post-conflict activity, peacebuilding includes issues of human security and the whole range of processes from crisis management and violence prevention to the more long-term efforts at relationship building, peace education, nonviolence training, and justice and reconciliation. Over the last two decades, it has evolved to encompass the different yet overlapping frameworks of conflict resolution, conflict management, conflict prevention, and conflict transformation. According to peace practitioner Lisa Schirch, peacebuilding ‘seeks to prevent, reduce, and transform conflict and help people recover from violence in all forms, even structural violence that has not yet led to massive civil unrest. At the same time, it empowers people to foster relationships’. Lisa Schirch, *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding* (Pennsylvania: Good Books, 2004), p.9.

20 John Paul Lederach first used the term conflict transformation in the context of the armed conflicts in Central America in the 1980s. Conflict transformation uses a transformative social change lens, drawing on insights from diverse disciplines, including sociology, psychology, history, political science, and religion and spirituality.
develop solutions that serve the interests of all stakeholders. Through such engagements, genuine processes of transformation become possible. In fact, WISCOMP sees long-term investments in processes of relationship-building, citizen participation, professional training in the field of peacebuilding, and the promotion of cultures of pluralism as prerequisites for broader institutional and societal transformation. There is no dearth of institutional designs and frameworks for peace agreements. Yet, none of these, it was felt, would bring the expected social change unless key stakeholders recognized the need to coexist and convert decision-making into an inclusive and collaborative process. Mutual trust, understanding, and cross-cutting relationships were therefore seen as the foundation for processes of constructive social change.

WISCOMP’s emphasis on such relationships is based on available research, which reveals that a high percentage of peace processes and accords collapse within five-to-ten years, resulting in a recurrence of violence in the country/region coded as ‘post-conflict’.21 It is now recognized that sustained dialogue with ‘the other’ helps to transform hostile relationships towards trust and increases the motivation for coexistence, which in turn influence the sustainability of peace processes. Although conventional discourses

---


Exploring the reasons for a recurrence of violence in ‘post-conflict’ societies, John Paul Lederach points to the tendency to focus on the institutional dimensions of peace agreements. He notes that little attention is paid to the fact that, apart from the ‘public handshake’, leaders may not have changed their beliefs and attitudes, particularly the ways in which they continue to perceive their ‘enemies’. Yet,
John Paul Lederach shares the following features as characteristic of a conflict transformation approach:

- A transformational approach recognizes that conflict is dynamic and normal in human relationships...There is a proactive bias towards seeing conflict as a potential catalyst for growth.

- In conflict transformation, relationships are central...Conflicts flow from and return to relationships...We must focus on the less visible dimensions of relationships, rather than concentrating exclusively on the content and substance of the fighting that is often more visible.

- Rather than seeing peace as a static ‘end-state’, conflict transformation views peace as a continuously evolving and developing quality of relationship.

- The capacity to live with apparent contradictions and paradoxes lies at the heart of conflict transformation. For example, it engages two paradoxes as the places where action is pursued: How do we address conflict in ways that reduce violence and increase justice in human relationships? And how do we develop a capacity for constructive, direct, face-to-face interaction and, at the same time, address systemic and structural changes?

- It addresses the content, context, and structure of the relationship through three lenses: While the first lens focuses on the immediate situation, the second tries to see beyond the presenting problems toward the deeper patterns of relationships between conflicting groups. The third lens looks at a conceptual framework that holds these perspectives together, connecting the presenting problems with the deeper relational patterns.


these are the people they have to live with and work with in order to build a peaceful and just society. While peace accords have been successful in dealing with the more immediate, crisis-oriented issues, they have rarely addressed the expectations for long-term social, economic, and cultural change which gave rise to the fighting in the first place. This is because while peace accords can establish the frameworks for democratic governance and participation, they cannot transform mindsets and attitudes. Examples of this gap can be seen in many ‘post-conflict’ democracies where the peace accord has had little impact on rates of gender-based violence, weapons’ proliferation, cultural prejudices, and societal inequities. John Paul Lederach, ‘The Challenge of the 21st Century: Justpeace’, People Building Peace: 35 Inspiring Stories from Around the World (Utrecht: European Center for Conflict Prevention, 1999).
Predicated on the reality of human interdependence, conflict transformation foregrounds the principles of dialogue and relationship. In the context of India-Pakistan relations, there is some recognition of this interdependence. The eradication of poverty and inequity requires economic growth, an increase in exports, employment opportunities, and investments across the region. Both India and Pakistan confront similar challenges of education, development, skills generation, employment, and growing urbanization. There is now a recognition of the mutuality of economic interest and the linkage between peace, economic prosperity, and the removal of poverty. This perspective has increasingly come to be validated by business groups in the two countries. Following Pakistan’s grant of Most Favored Nation status to India and the latter’s removal of a long-standing ban on foreign investment from Pakistan in 2011–12, business leaders are attempting to increase stakeholding in each other’s economies.

In the case of India and Pakistan, conflict transformation has but one meaning. Making people-to-people contact simpler and easier. Easing visa policies and travel restrictions. Exempting travellers from the dreadful ‘police reporting’ when visiting each other’s countries.

Rubina Jabbar
Freelance Journalist, Karachi
(Workshop alumnus, 2005)
by focusing on investment linkages and the efficient facilitation of formal trade (which would reduce the large volume of informal trade between the two countries). Once this happens, the mutual economic gains for both countries would be immense.

2.1. Conflict Analysis: Sources of Otherization and Humanization

The Conflict Transformation Workshops were based on WISCOMP’s analysis that the absence of sustained face-to-face interaction, along with conflicting narratives on issues ranging from Kashmir to Hindu-Muslim relations in British India and the partition of 1947, have resulted in deep-rooted prejudices and hostility between the peoples of the two countries. State propaganda, political discourse, biased media coverage, and one-sided narratives of history in textbooks have meshed together to construct two overarching images—the ‘omnipresent enemy’ and the ‘benign self’. Not surprisingly, the dominant narrative (on both sides) is one in which ‘we are the victims, threatened by the cruel enemy who is responsible for the suffering that our side has endured’. Within such a narrative, it becomes possible for politicians and ‘spoilers’ to arouse jingoistic passion and to acquire public support for large arsenals of weapons.22

Ironically, while enemy images of ‘the other’ abound, there is little understanding of who they really are. WISCOMP decided to engage more deeply with this subject by including a cluster of questions in the baseline survey (administered among the Indian and Pakistani participants prior to their attendance in the Conflict Transformation Workshops). Some of these are shared here:

What are the means or sources through which we have formed our perceptions about people from ‘the other’ country? Do the stories our parents and school teachers tell us influence the way we think? Or, do television channels, newspapers, and the myriad sources of information on the internet determine our construction of who we count as our friends and those to whom we relegate the label of adversary? Do face-to-face encounters and conversations play a part in the formulation of these images?

Let us look at two comments (by a Pakistani and an Indian participant) from the pre-Workshop questionnaires. Their comments were in response to a question that asked them to share their perceptions of ‘the other’ country.

---

22 As a result of such processes, the resolution of less complex bilateral conflicts has been delayed. For instance, there was the expectation that through a process of sustained contact and application, the agenda of the government-level composite dialogue would be lightened with the resolution of some of these conflicts, such as Siachen, the Tulbul Navigation Project, and the release of innocent fishermen languishing in ‘the other’ country’s jails. Yet, the deep deficit of trust (and the lack of political will) have delayed formal agreements on these issues.
An aspirant of big-power status, India is a hegemonic state. It tends to be intransigent, self-righteous, and not inclined to listen and understand. Violations of human rights in Kashmir, denial of the right of self-determination to Kashmiris, disregard of UN resolutions, its haughty attitude in all regional issues and organizations, and its hegemonic designs with regard to South Asia bespeak of its lack of understanding of the basic problems at the local and regional levels. India is also guilty of sparking off an arms race in South Asia which has caught every other state in its neighborhood in a security dilemma.

[Comment by a Pakistani participant in the questionnaire administered before the 2012 CT Workshop]

Pakistan is a country gone awry. A country with an anti-India policy and a lot of prejudice against Indians…It is the source of a whole lot of trouble…stronghold of extremist Islamist organizations, rampant terrorism, fragile democracy, militarism, women without rights, non-developed regions, worrying nuclear arsenal, and a political class that’s trapped in the pockets of the military class.

[Comment by an Indian participant in the questionnaire administered before the 2012 CT Workshop]

Since the two comments captured the common perceptions of many Pakistani and Indian respondents (in the pre-Workshop surveys), we decided to engage more deeply with them. Neither of the two respondents had travelled to ‘the other’ country or met anyone from there. Yet, both held strong views about ‘the other’. While the Pakistani participant mentioned that India was ‘enemy country’, the Indian participant couldn’t stop referring to ‘terrorism and extremism emanating from Pakistani soil’. Upon further probing about the means through which they formulated their opinions about ‘the enemy’, they rated ‘community perceptions’ and ‘popular media’ (TV, newspapers, radio, internet) as ‘most significant factors’. ‘Historical reasons’ (as interpreted by their family and teachers), ‘attitudes of religious leaders’, and ‘common gossip’ came a close second. The experience of interacting with ‘the other’ did not figure in this ranking. And the reason was simple: they had never met ‘the other’!

At a wider level, the overall data from the baseline study revealed a similar pattern. For the Pakistani respondents, the ‘most significant’ sources of information about Indians were ‘community perceptions’ (79.7%), ‘popular media’ (77.7%), ‘history’ (66.6%), ‘attitudes of religious leaders’ (60.5%), and ‘common gossip’ (55.5%). Similarly, among the Indians, factors that received high ratings (as sources through which perceptions were created) included: ‘community perceptions’ (67.5%), ‘popular
media’ (63.5%), ‘historical reasons’ (57%), ‘common gossip’ (50%), and ‘attitudes of religious leaders’ (50%). A sub-region disaggregation of the data revealed that 100% of the Kashmiri respondents felt that the ‘popular media’ had played a ‘most significant’ role in increasing hostility (between Indians and Pakistanis and, within India, between those living in the Kashmir Valley and the rest of India).

Since the majority of the Pakistani respondents had not met an Indian, the survey category ‘experience of interacting with the other’ received a low rank, with only 26.3% mentioning this as an important factor. Likewise, only 28.5% of the Indian respondents felt that the ‘experience of interacting with the other’ was a significant factor in how they perceived Pakistanis. Further, 42.5% of the respondents (Indians and Pakistanis together) were ‘unsure’, in the baseline surveys, as to whether the ‘experience of interacting with the other’ could influence perceptions about identity and conflict. These perspectives changed significantly post-attendance in the WISCOMP Workshops. See Annexure 1 for a more detailed elucidation.

Since the majority of Indians and Pakistanis did not have the experience of travelling to ‘the other’ country or meeting anyone from there, they drew on government and media projections, family narratives, history textbooks, and community perceptions to form their opinions. Not surprisingly, these perceptions were replete with memories of violence, displacement, and trauma. What emerged lucidly was the paradox of intensely disliking people of a particular nationality even though one had not met anyone from there. The trauma of the 1947 partition, which had metamorphosed into a high wall of mistrust following the war of 1965, had resulted in a gradual shutting down of most avenues for contact between ordinary Indians and Pakistanis. The rigid visa policy that the two countries followed towards one another ensured that even a once-in-a-lifetime crossing of the border to meet separated family members or travel for purposes of tourism, trade, or a conference, would remain the exception rather than the norm. As a result, young Indians and Pakistanis entered the 21st century with deeply embedded adversarial perceptions and prejudices about one another—far removed from the ground reality on ‘the other side’. For example, Maria Gulraize Khan, a Strategic Planning Specialist with the Education Development Center, Lahore (and alumnus of two Conflict Transformation Workshops), in a note to WISCOMP, said that a sense of ‘familiarity’ was often mistaken for ‘knowledge’ about ‘the other’ side.

Growing up as a teenager in Lahore in the 1990s was mind-boggling. Propaganda on state television channels hardened people against the

---

23 Not surprisingly, this small group comprised respondents who had met Indians/Pakistanis (‘the other’) at conferences/workshops or had studied with them at university in a third country.
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. Yet, despite the image of the demon that dwelt 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 cassettes of Bollywood movies.

In the context of these findings from the baseline study, WISCOMP advanced the theory that in all these years of hostility, the one factor that could have helped to deescalate conflict and increase understanding was regular contact and sustained dialogue—not just between political leaders, army officers, and bureaucrats in the two countries, but between a wide cross-section of citizens including educators, students, policy analysts, development workers, business leaders, sports-persons, performing artists, religious leaders, women’s groups, lawyers, and human rights activists.

The Conflict Transformation Workshops were, therefore, based on the theoretical assumption that the personal experience of interacting with ‘the other’ (including living and eating with them) can build empathy and motivate adversaries to find common ground. To test this theory, the post-Workshop survey invited the alumni to share their views on the following question:

*If you could bring about a constructive change in the adversarial ways in which people of different nationalities or communities perceive each other, which factors would you consider most and least significant in this process?*

Having been participants to a process of sustained dialogue through the Conflict Transformation Workshops, the alumni—Indian and Pakistani—voted overwhelmingly for the category ‘personal experience of interacting with the other’ in efforts to build bridges of understanding and friendship across fault-lines (see Annexure 1). Over 92% of the participants felt that the experience of interacting with those perceived as ‘the other’ was the ‘most significant factor’ in facilitating positive shifts in perceptions. They stated that meeting and dialoguing with ‘the other’ had helped them to form their own opinions and shed prejudices.

WISCOMP was, however, mindful of the reality that such individual journeys can face a setback if they are not organized as part of a structured, longer-term process. Although people-to-people contact through cricket matches, film festivals, and teacher/student exchanges are vital, the sustenance of a peace process depends on how deeply Indians and Pakistanis are able to engage with each other’s worldviews and narratives, and that too on a sustained basis. WISCOMP’s view is that participants in a dialogue
need time and space to step into the shoes of ‘the other’ and see the world through their eyes. It is only through frequent meetings and long-term relationship building activities that participants can truly begin to understand one another and develop the motivation to work together for sustainable peace. In fact, the endline survey confirmed that the participants left the Workshop space with a deep awareness of this theory of change. For instance, the survey asked participants if they agreed with the following statement: ‘Understanding and appreciating “the other’s” point of view and “walking in his/her shoes” is crucial to any process of conflict transformation.’ More than 87% of the Indians and 89% of the Pakistanis expressed ‘total agreement’ with this statement.

The sub-region disaggregated data revealed that the Indians, Pakistanis, and Kashmiris responded differently with respect to the significance of other factors. For example, in the pre-Workshop survey, the Kashmiri participants said that the ‘popular media’ had played a ‘most significant’ role in perpetuating hostility. However, in the post-Workshop survey, 83.3% also stated that the media could play a ‘most significant’ role in building bridges between Indians, Pakistanis, and Kashmiris. In comparison, the Indians demonstrated less faith in the media’s positive role (37.5%), while 66% of the Pakistanis felt that the media could play a ‘most significant’ peacebuilding role.

The endline study also revealed that participants were now less inclined to depend on community perceptions to form opinions about those perceived as ‘the other’, with only 10% seeing this as a ‘most significant’ source of knowledge. Common gossip too was no longer considered to be even marginally significant in influencing views about ‘the other’. Religious leaders were seen as possessing the power to play the role of both ‘spoilers’ and ‘peacemakers’. Although an overwhelming majority of participants felt that these leaders had encouraged the building of adversarial identities, there was also the acknowledgment that they could play a significant role in promoting inter-community and inter-state reconciliation. While 50% of the Pakistani respondents expressed this sentiment, Indians were more skeptical with only 25% sharing this view.

The relevance of historical narratives fell marginally in the endline study. Many participants expressed the view that while it is important to ‘deal with the past’, particularly if they—as the third and fourth generations—are to jettison the ‘baggage of partitions and wars’ once and for all, dwelling too much on the ‘accuracy’ of historical narratives would inhibit reconciliation. However, about one-third of the respondents—33.2% Pakistanis and 30.5% Indians—continued to believe that an
engagement with historical narratives was a prerequisite for building bridges between the two countries. Within this group, there were some who explained their position by referring to recent efforts to document oral narratives, which highlight stories of courage and compassion where Hindus and Muslims reached out to help one another during the mass violence that surrounded partition. The usefulness of such narratives to conflict transformation efforts was thus underscored. Also, Kashmiri participants who supported this view added that engaging with such narratives is a prerequisite for trauma healing—a deeply-felt need for those who continue to live under the shadow of violence. The relevance of historical narratives, particularly those surrounding the 1947 partition, is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 4 (in the section titled *The Past That Lies Before Us*).

### 2.2. Sustained dialogue builds cross-border strategic relationships and perspectival change.

WISCOMP advanced the hypothesis that if face-to-face dialogues and professional training in the field of conflict transformation were conducted on a sustained basis, then these would lead to the building of strategic relationships across the divisions of conflict. These, in turn, would contribute to the building of a foundation for sustainable peace and security, both within and between India and Pakistan.

WISCOMP invested faith in the ability of structured dialogue, conducted by skilled, knowledgeable, and sensitive facilitators, to transform conflict perceptions, reduce prejudice, and build trust between Indians and Pakistanis. Based on the assumption that there is no substitute for direct engagement between adversaries, the dialogue was designed to help participants talk about their needs and fears as well as to understand the other’s worldview. It also encouraged participants to take into account mutual needs and vulnerabilities and move to a space of trust where myths and half-truths could be shared and discussed.  

This, WISCOMP believed, would enhance awareness of the prevailing situation (on ‘the other side’), deepen the knowledge that Indians and Pakistanis had about one another, and serve as a motivator for individuals across fault-lines to engage in a joint visioning exercise for a future that was more peaceful and prosperous. The expectation was that such encounters would lead to the emergence of ‘strategic relationships’ wherein personal friendships would be meshed with professional partnerships. Although personal bonds of affection formed the fulcrum of these

---

24 A significant assumption here was that participants should come with some motivation to listen to ‘the other side’ and attempt to understand their point of view. This is an important first step in a dialogue process because participants often fear that which they don’t understand.
relationships, WISCOMP believed that they become most effective when participants also collaborate professionally and build institutional linkages. Common action plans, which included possibilities for joint research, advocacy coalitions, inter-community civic associations, cross-border professional associations, et al, were thus envisioned to build ‘strategic alliances’ among the alumni. The assumption was that such linkages provide pre-established networks of communication across fault-lines that can prove to be extremely valuable in the chaos (and hysteria) that surround border skirmishes, political conflicts, and terror attacks.

When participants forge such ‘strategic relationships’, they not only shed long-held enemy images of ‘the other’ but are more likely to cooperate together to constructively address conflict and garner the collective power to affect broader change processes. They are also less likely to support jingoistic calls for violent action against ‘the other’. Their role becomes particularly critical in times of crisis and can influence the discourse within which bureaucrats and politicians develop policy formulations.

2.3. Professional training in conflict transformation is a primary methodology for successful peacebuilding.

WISCOMP also advanced the hypothesis that the presence of cross-border relationships and the motivation for reconciliation are not sufficient factors to build sustainable peace and security. Training in conflict transformation skills such as active listening, dialogue, empathy, and the cultivation of respect for ‘the other’s’ differing beliefs are a prerequisite for social change. While some individuals may have a greater proclivity towards these, WISCOMP believed that these are learned skills, acquired only with training, introspection, and consistent practice. As an Islamabad-based consultant who attended the 2012 Workshop put it: ‘Most of us write about political and security dynamics, but to practice peace, we know little.’

To WISCOMP, the teaching of conflict transformation is not simply a goal, but a peacebuilding methodology through which participants can learn to engage in analytical conversations on the root causes of conflicts, humanize those perceived as ‘the other’, and most significantly, build trusting relationships across fault-lines. This perspective was affirmed by Workshop alumni who voted overwhelmingly for the Conflict Transformation Workshop model as an important peacebuilding method.

25 For example, in the wake of the Mumbai terror attacks of 2008, Workshop alumni reached out to one another, taking a united position against all forms of violence. They also rejected calls for aggressive action and ‘quick attacks’, instead emphasizing the need for the two sides to talk. The alumni’s responses are documented in Chapter 3 in the section titled Confronting Prejudice: A Gentle Knock on the Doors of Perception.
Participants found the training/skill-building sessions to be very helpful. These sessions provided them with the ‘expertise and skills to actually do something’ and generated in them a sense of empowerment because they now knew how to implement ideas about peacebuilding to the Indo-Pak face-off. Equally significant, they now had the relationships and networks to ‘make that difference’. For instance, Deepti Mahajan, Associate Fellow, TERI, New Delhi (and alumnus of the 2003 Workshop) shared the following reflections:

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.26

When WISCOMP asked Workshop alumni to rank those peacebuilding methods that were most appropriate for the India-Pakistan context, they reflected a greater knowledge of, and sensitivity to, the valuable role that peacebuilding methods such as ‘advocacy’, ‘trauma healing’, and ‘building relationships through face-to-face dialogue’ can play in laying the foundation for sustainable peace between India and Pakistan. Post-attendance in the Workshops, respondents voted overwhelmingly for different forms of people-to-people contact as ‘extremely important’ methods for building trust. Reference was made, in particular, to cultural programs (including theater, dance, puppetry, and other forms of creative expression), student-faculty exchanges, journalist exchanges, and sports diplomacy. In addition, they pointed to the need for educational programs that focused on the inculcation of ‘human, universal values’ such as respect for the sanctity of life, belief in the innate goodness of all human beings, et al. Reference was also made to the need for educators from the two countries to start joint history writing projects to generate common teaching materials and books, which Indian and Pakistani schools could use.

My most valuable learning from the Conflict Transformation Workshops is the realization that people with a motivation for peacebuilding must necessarily be equipped with skills in conflict transformation. Moreover, a peacebuilder ought to learn to listen and should possess the insatiable urge to acquire more knowledge. This mix of skills’ training, hands-on experiences, action research, and real dialogue was very valuable. Without these, I would have come away as a passive academic.

Zahid Shahab Ahmed
Assistant Professor, National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad

A comparison of the ways in which respondents saw peacebuilding strategies before and after their participation in the WISCOMP Workshops revealed the following shifts.27

- A more significant role for ‘advocacy’ was articulated with the percentage of those considering this peacebuilding method to be ‘extremely important’ going up from 66.6% in the baseline survey to 90% in the endline survey.

- Less faith was expressed in peacekeeping as a peacebuilding method. While 50% said that ‘peacekeeping by international agencies’ was ‘extremely important’ prior to the Workshop, only 23% of the participants supported this view in the post-Workshop survey.

- The post-Workshop survey also reported a more significant role for ‘disarmament’ as a peacebuilding strategy with its importance increasing by 15%.

- The biggest shift was observed with respect to ‘trauma healing’, which increased by 20% from baseline to endline. This could perhaps be attributed to the Workshop’s emphasis on psychosocial healing as an important strategy of peacebuilding, particularly with respect to the everyday violence that many participants experience in their local contexts, whether in the Kashmir Valley, in Gujarat, or in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Participants who came from these and other regions experiencing social/political violence showed greater sensitivity to the need to foreground psychosocial healing as an important peacebuilding strategy.

The importance that respondents accorded to ‘training and educating people’ and to ‘building relationships’ remained more-or-less stable. In the baseline, about 88% participants had considered these to be ‘extremely important’. These figures, which increased to 100% for both categories in the endline, reflect the view that the trust deficit and lack of regular contact present very serious challenges to peacebuilding efforts. By voting for these two methods of peacebuilding, respondents validated an important theoretical assumption on which the Conflict Transformation Workshops were predicated.

However, a rider was put here: In the absence of the ‘political will’ to resolve the conflict, none of these strategies would have the necessary effect. The stringent visa policy, which hindered the free flow of people, goods, and services—not just between India and Pakistan but also between the two sides of Kashmir—was cited as an example.

---

27 Ratings of peacebuilding methods which shifted by four percent points or less (from baseline to endline) have not been shared here. For more details, see Annexure 1.
The disaggregated data with respect to Indian, Pakistani, and Kashmiri respondents showed that Kashmiris (from both sides of the LoC) had less faith in political diplomacy. While 75% of the Indians and 98.5% of the Pakistanis said that political diplomacy was ‘extremely important’, only 65% of the Kashmiri respondents felt this way. They also felt, much less than Indians and Pakistanis, that peacekeeping by international agencies could serve any useful purpose. While about 10% of the Indians and Pakistanis felt that peacekeeping was ‘not important at all’, 25% of the Kashmiris felt this way. They also differed from the Indians and Pakistanis in their views with respect to ‘research into the causes of conflict’. Kashmiris spoke in unison with 100% saying that ‘research into the causes of conflict’ was ‘extremely important’ as a peacebuilding methodology. In comparison, between 80% and 85% of the Indians and Pakistanis felt this way.

In addition, the Kashmiri participants felt that ‘building relationships through sustained face-to-face dialogue’—and more specifically between the people of divided regions such as Jammu and Kashmir—was an ‘extremely important’ peacebuilding method. However, Kashmiris from the Indian side stated that this should not be seen as a substitute for a political solution. Similarly, although the majority of them (75%) saw trade, investment, and economic development as an ‘extremely important’ peacebuilding method in the endline study, they qualified their support with the rider that these should not be attempted as a substitute for a serious political dialogue on the constitutional future of Jammu and Kashmir. In addition, 20% of the Kashmiri participants added the category, ‘providing justice’ as an ‘extremely important’ peacebuilding method. Since they experience the consequences of violence and insecurity on a regular basis, the Kashmiri participants appeared to have a more intimate understanding of, and sensitivity to, needs such as human dignity and justice.

Since the focus on communication skills was an important component of the training-practice sessions, often, participants reported that they found these to be helpful in addressing the everyday conflicts they encountered. While some related to the realms of the home and the workplace, others were with reference to broader incidents of criminal, sectarian, and/or community-based violence. For example, in the endline survey, a Lahore-based journalist talked about the insecurity she felt owing to the increase in insurgent and sectarian violence that had gripped Pakistan in recent years. While she engaged with strategies for the transformation of the Kashmir conflict and other Indo-Pak dividers, she felt that it was equally important to build the capacity of young Pakistanis to respond to the sectarian violence that had increased the insecurity of citizens across the country. In this respect, the Workshops built transformational capacity to respond to conflicts at different levels of social interaction, within and across Indian and Pakistani societies.
2.4. ‘The Strategic Who’: Multi-track diplomacy, which seeks to build web-like relationships of interdependence between different sectors of divided societies, is an important strategy for sustainable peace between India and Pakistan.

While formulations of the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of conflict transformation are vital to peacebuilding, equally significant is an identification of ‘the strategic who’—the participants or the stakeholders who will be involved in this process. John Paul Lederach defines the ‘strategic who’ as those actors who when brought together to work collectively have the capacity to initiate and sustain social change by pooling in their skills, expertise, energies, and resources. Through their actions, they have the capacity to replicate and exponentially affect the larger whole. Some of these actors also represent vocations not conventionally associated with the field of peacebuilding, but whose involvement can significantly impact the peace process. In addition to politicians, diplomats, and military generals, they include conflict resolution professionals, educators, journalists, lawyers, academicians, trauma counselors, entrepreneurs, musicians, cinema actors and directors, philanthropists, grant-making organizations, private citizens, activists, religious leaders, women’s groups, youth groups, think-tanks and NGOs working on issues of peace and conflict, et al. Foregrounding the expertise of these diverse actors, multi-track diplomacy advocates the view that peacebuilding is group effort and requires the participation of several stakeholders.

In this context, WISCOMP invested considerable time and energy in its selection of both Workshop participants and resource persons, ensuring that they represent these diverse ‘tracks’ of peacebuilding. The purpose, at all times, has been to explore how these diverse actors can use strategic coordination and collaboration to maximize the impact of their peacebuilding efforts and thereby affect broader change processes between the two countries. In so doing, the Conflict Transformation Workshops have also brought to a common space the ostensibly ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ issues of peacebuilding where Realist paradigms of security have engaged with grassroots discourses on conflict transformation, justice, and reconciliation. They have bridged the divides between different tracks of peacebuilding—shifting away from a discourse that pits policymakers and military generals against grassroots practitioners and journalists.

---

28 The term ‘multi-track diplomacy’ was coined by peace practitioners Louise Diamond and John MacDonald. It refers to a complex web of processes that incorporates different roles, strategies, and interventions employed by diverse stakeholders in a society. It includes a wide range of processes from crisis management (humanitarian assistance and ceasefire negotiations) to the more long-term efforts of relationship-building, peace education, nonviolence training, and restorative processes of justice and reconciliation.
Such dichotomous ways of looking at hard/soft issues and state/civil society actors fail to recognize the strategic value that transforming relationships at all levels of society can give to a peace process, even at the track one level.

WISCOMP surveyed Workshop participants on the relationship between multi-track diplomacy and conflict transformation. In the endline study, they articulated an awareness of the need for a multi-track approach where diverse actors played unique yet connected roles. See Figure 1d in Annexure 1 for participant responses on the importance of multi-track diplomacy as a strategy for building sustainable peace between India and Pakistan.

2.5. Our generation will deliver peace…?

Within the framework of multi-track diplomacy, WISCOMP used a ‘generational approach’ to peacebuilding, investing in youth leaders who were strategically located to impact peacebuilding efforts. The Workshops attempted to create a space where young people could rise above the baggage of preceding generations and build a future based on trust and mutual respect. Implicit here was the belief that the act of separating one’s own experience from that of the previous generation(s) is crucial to ending the cycle of fear and hate.

WISCOMP also focused on developing new leadership models for young Pakistanis and Indians who would be in positions of political and economic decision-making 20 years hence. The significance of engaging with this demographic group cannot be overstated. For instance, while India’s youth (below the age of 35) constitute 65% of the country’s population, in Pakistan, 47% of the 84.3 million people registered as voters are aged under-35. If the attitudes of the young can be influenced to support the idea of peaceful coexistence, this would go a long way in building long-term peace and security.
Deepti Mahajan, an alumnus of the 2003 Conflict Transformation Workshop (who later joined the WISCOMP team to help in the facilitation of these dialogues) summed this theory of change in the following words:

The focus on the ‘generational approach’ has immense merits…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. 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 societal changes. Thirdly, it works with the assumption that 20 years hence, when one of the persons ‘converted’ by the program or in some way touched by its ideas, reaches the negotiation table, s/he will bring a radically different point of view to the discussions at the track one level.29

Was this theory validated through the experience of the Conflict Transformation Workshops? Were the young Indian and Pakistani participants ready to shed the ‘baggage’ of the past that the first and second generations had carried? Were they ready to move on and embrace each other? Were the common aspirations and dreams, which they articulated for themselves and their families, sufficient to unite them to collectively transform the conflict?

The Workshop dialogues did help participants to think more analytically about how their membership to a certain age-group had generated a joint stake-holding in terms of their personal and professional aspirations and the futures of their countries. For example, in the post-Workshop questionnaires, they were asked to rate different aspects of their identity based on the importance accorded to each. Expressing greater awareness of their own potential as youth leaders and ability to connect with other young people across fault-lines, 47% of the Workshop respondents drew their ‘primary identity’ from their membership to the 20-35 age-group and another 16% saw this ‘generational identity’ to be ‘important’. The baseline survey, in comparison, had shown lower figures with about 18% and 14% seeing this as a ‘primary identity’ and an ‘important identity’, respectively.

The corresponding qualitative data confirmed that the Indian and Pakistani participants experienced a sense of connection and felt that they had more in common than any generation before them. As a result, their age emerged as a cross-cutting identity—transcending the fault-lines of borders, national identities, and divisive narratives.

For example, Ahmed Ijaz Malik, Assistant Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, said:

*By sharing views, undertaking combined study for projects and presentations, and spending time together, we realized how alike our thoughts were. We realized that this generation has new ideas and goals and will not be stuck with old rivalries.*

Infused with the vitality and energy of youth that participants brought with them, the Workshops reflected the sentiment of a growing number of young people to have a different kind of future—a future based on trust, respect, and cooperation. They often articulated the view that their generation would do things differently, and the internet age had made them most suited to play the role of bridge-builders between the past and the future. Passionately asserting that ‘it has to be our generation’, Umaira Amir-Ud-Din, Creative Head at Crystallia Ibrahim Knitwear, Lahore (and alumnus of the 2004 Workshop titled *Dialogic Engagement*), sent the following note to WISCOMP in 2008:

*We have fewer reasons to hate each other. We are not eye witnesses to the bloodshed of partition. Contact with one another has enhanced our capacity to move beyond prejudices towards resolution. It has broadened our minds enough to respect each other’s freedom. We now realize the need for working together in harmony towards mutual socio-economic benefits. As writers, economists, and social workers, we, perhaps more than others, realize the need for peace in the region.*

In addition to demonstrating this awareness that as ‘future influentials’ they had an important role to play in building peace, participants also expressed the view that by virtue of belonging to the third and fourth generations—or as one of them put it, ‘the Facebook generation’—they had access to information and to people in a way that their parents did not. For example, Facebook had made it possible for Workshop participants based in Muzaffarabad, Srinagar, Delhi, and Islamabad to start their own online dialogue, share pictures of home and

---

*Khadija Amjad*  
*Project Manager, USAID, Lahore*  
*(Alumnus, 2001 & 2003 Workshops)*

I feel a high degree of appreciation for how far we have been able to move ahead 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. Our generation [therefore] 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 the preceding generations, but because of them that we also owe it to the bright future that awaits us all…
family, and update each other about the ever-changing social and political realities they live in. Even though such opportunities are commonplace, it would be instructive to note here that their parents and grandparents had no means through which to communicate in such ways. In fact, the iron curtain between the two Kashmirs was lifted as recently as 2005 when marginal people-to-people contact was allowed through the cross-LoC bus service and later through cross-LoC trade in 2008.

However, there was also the recognition that daunting challenges lie ahead—the most significant being the vested interests that have developed in the perpetuation of the conflict. In this context, reference was made to the populist politics that governments on both sides have indulged in as also the stake that some politicians now have in the continuation of the conflict. How do youth leaders address this challenge? Lalit Lobo, a Producer with Times Now, Mumbai, and an alumnus of the First Workshop in 2001, made the following suggestion:

*If our generation wants to make a meaningful impact, it must enter politics and clean the system from within, making it responsive and honest. I 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 each other. We need to change the way politics are conducted and make sure that politicians stop using the ‘foreign hand’, ‘the terrorist’, ‘the enemy other’, and ‘mosque-temple politics’ to polarize our societies... 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...when they realize that peace with the neighbor will bring them electoral victory. The next time politicians force our armies to go to war, vote them out. We, the young 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.*

Several participants shared this view and expressed disappointment at the way the political class in the two countries had milked the various bilateral conflicts for their own vested interests. The expectation that today’s politicians would take decisions based on foresight and for the ‘common good’ was belied. Instead, they had used jingoism (implicit in which is a demonization of ‘the other’) to unite their respective nations at times of discontent and dissent, knowing well that these would help in electoral victory. In this context, participants felt that if their generation could change the way politics was conducted in their respective countries, then they would have demonstrated the capacity to build peace. The hope, therefore, was that the third and
fourth generations would usher in a new era of politics—a progressive politics focused on peace, development, and coexistence.

The challenge of sustainability was also articulated by many participants who felt that social change would come about only if such cross-border dialogues were conducted on a regular basis over a long period of time. For example, Farooq Ahmad Dar, Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad (and alumnus of the 2005 Workshop), said:

*If this process of meeting regularly 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’.*

Although a majority of the Workshop participants talked about shedding the baggage of the past and focusing on common interests and a connected future, there was some uncertainty about investing too much in the youth’s role as agents for peace. While some postulated that the hate was too deep-seated and the ‘spoilers’ too powerful, others changed their views as a result of the political mood in the two countries. The Mumbai terror attacks of 2008, for instance, represented perhaps a watershed in terms of the significant ways in which some alumni changed their perspectives—from optimism to skepticism. To cite an example, a Mumbai-based broadcast journalist who had reported the 2008 attacks in the city, underwent such a change. After his participation in the First Workshop in 2001, he had shared with WISCOMP the following view: ‘War with Pakistan horrifies me to a much greater extent now than it did seven days ago.’ However, following the terror attacks, his optimism had dwindled and he felt that such cross-border youth initiatives could accomplish little in the face of the immense power that the ‘spoilers’ held.

Nidhi Soni, Editor, Newslink Services, Delhi (and alumnus of the 2005 Annual Workshop) pointed to an equally significant challenge—the role played by educational institutions in building enemy images of ‘the other’:

*Our generation (on both sides) has been fed misinterpreted history (in school). Unless we overcome the consequences of this 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 economic ties.*

These challenges notwithstanding, it was heartening to observe that the participants agreed on one point—their decision to *not* pass on the burden of acrimonious and
misinterpreted history to their children would be the real test of their generation’s ability to deliver peace.

2.6. Peace processes become irreversible when individuals introspect on their own perceptions and radiate inner peace in their own lives.

The cyclical relationship between personal change and social change has served as a guiding compass for the Workshop curriculum, reflecting WISCOMP’s belief that conflict transformation must begin at the individual level before it can permeate into communities and societies. Each Workshop has therefore offered participants hands-on tools and daily practices to nourish the internal capacity for nonviolence and empathy.

Although these ideas exist as spiritual truths across the world’s diverse cultures, the end of the Cold War provided a context for some states and international organizations to garner the collective will to apply them to efforts to end armed conflicts. These processes shaped the contours of peacebuilding—a field which has since received increasing attention from governments and civil society organizations. This attention was perhaps most visibly reflected in 2005 when the United Nations set up a Peacebuilding Commission. Today, the foreign ministries of several countries have designated ‘peacebuilding desks’, and university-supported peace and conflict study centers have mushroomed across the world.

Yet, it is estimated that a high percentage of peace processes and accords collapse within five to ten years, resulting in a recurrence of violence in the country/region coded as ‘post-conflict’. U.S. President Barack Obama drew attention to this trend when, in 2007, he stated that the United States was on the ‘wrong battlefield’ when it shifted focus from Afghanistan to Iraq in the mid-2000s.30

Armed violence continues to kill and maim a surprisingly large number of civilians, particularly children, around the world. According to the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, in the year 2011, ‘armed conflict’ killed 52,000 people. In addition, it estimated that in ‘peaceful countries’, over 500,000 people are killed each year as a result of lethal violence. Many more—200,000—die from poverty and hunger, the indirect effects of armed conflict. About 50% of these deaths take place in Asia, primarily in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.31


Ironically, South Asia, the cradle of nonviolence and myriad peace traditions, has emerged as a region where prejudice and hate, poverty and inequality, mix dangerously together to create cycles of violence and oppression.

Why is the field of peacebuilding, despite extensive scholarship and vast resources at its disposal, unable to sustain processes of conflict transformation? Different reasons have been cited for the challenges that such efforts encounter. These range from economic, political, and institutional factors to those related to the existence of fragmented and hostile relationships at different levels. Critics have also noted that the focus on establishing societal peace through institutional change and inter-group dialogue has not yielded the expected results. The assumption was that once peace accords and democratic institutions were in place, the benefits of peace would trickle down to each person. But this hasn’t happened on the ground.

Less attention was paid to the reverse of this theory—which is that the seeds of peace and justice should be sown in human hearts first. Governments have invested resources on the external dimension of societal transformation, often at the expense of the need for individual transformation. While Mohandas Gandhi’s assertion, ‘be the change you want to see in the world’ has remained a talisman for peacebuilders around the world, personal change has often been relegated to a later stage in light of what stakeholders consider to be the more pressing issues. Yet, it is difficult for individuals to work for social change without undergoing a deep transformation themselves. Such change requires personal commitment, discipline, and a high level of self-awareness. For many peacebuilders, it is perhaps easier to focus on the conflict ‘out there’ than to look inwards and examine how our own actions influence the suffering around us.
Today, there is a growing recognition among peace practitioners of the need to focus on this vital piece of the puzzle—namely, inner peace. The assertion of spiritual leaders that ‘peace in the outer world’ depends on our ability to practice ‘peace and compassion in our own lives’, has now become a practical necessity. The cultivation of empathy to a point where individuals ‘embrace a shared, common humanity’, particularly with those perceived as enemies, is a prerequisite for ending violence and creating a world where future generations can coexist peacefully.

The challenge for peacebuilders today is to implement this globally, at multiple levels. In other words, within the home, we treat our family members with the same respect that we wish from them; at the level of the collective, we show compassion to those who are different from us as well as those who disagree with us; at a global level, we treat other nations as we would wish our country to be treated.

Drawing on this theory of change, the Conflict Transformation Workshops have encouraged participants to think about how they can nourish the internal capacity for peace and coexist with the difference and diversity that surrounds them. It has advanced the view that by practicing peace in our own lives, we can by example and influence, respond to the suffering we see around us and spread the ethical revolution for a safer and happier world. This has set participants on individual journeys that address questions such as: How do we make empathy for all people a part of our daily practice? How do we begin the journey inwards, and work for peace inside-out? How do we stay on this path of transformation?

It was heartening to see in the post-Workshop feedback report that some of the biggest shifts among participants took place with respect to the subject of individual-level change. The majority of participants felt that a key learning was that peacebuilding does not imply solving other people’s problems; but rather it begins with a daily practice of acting compassionately towards all those they encounter. For example, Mossarat Qadeem, Founder of Paiman Trust, Islamabad (and Workshop resource person), speaking in the context of her work with mothers of radicalized youth in the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regions of Pakistan said: ‘Unless and until one does not realize the necessity of building inner peace, there will be no social cohesion in the community and people will not be receptive to the ideas of conflict prevention.’
The Workshop sessions that addressed this inner dimension of peace were both empowering and humbling for several participants. For instance, Saira Bano Orakzai, an educator from Peshawar (and alumnus of the 2005 Workshop titled *Envisioning Futures*) shared the following:

> 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? I discovered at the Workshop that my greatest power to positively transform the conflict ultimately rested in the ability to create peace from within. When we analyze the societies of India and Pakistan, we find a general tendency towards violence, emotional outbursts, and proliferation of conflicts at all levels. 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...Inner peace leads to social healing; it eschews revenge. It reminds us that reconciliation begins with our inner self...the absence of inner peace deprives us of the virtues of compassion, and love for humanity beyond territories, boundaries, and ideologies.

Saira’s Indian dialogue partner at the Workshop, Anuradha Choudry (Research Associate at the Center for Indian Psychology, Jain University, Bangalore) added:

> Listening to so many experts on the issues of war and peace and the attempts made to deal with them over decades, gave me the conviction that the actual solution to the problem lay within each individual and if we want peace in the world around us, there is an urgent need to tackle the violence and prejudices in oneself first. In short, ‘we must be the change we want to see’. Human beings all over the world are the same, even when they belong to a so-called ‘enemy state’. We all share the same dreams and aspirations of a world free from violence with equal opportunities for all to progress and make the most of life. We share the same fears and pain with the death and misery of another human being...then why fight each other?

Saira and Anuradha’s views on the importance of self-awareness and critical thinking as the foundation for social change found a resonance among other Workshop participants. For example, in the post-Workshop questionnaires, 66% of the respondents expressed ‘total disagreement’ with the statement, ‘a peaceful state of mind for the individual and peaceful relations between countries are entirely different and do not impact each other’. An additional 18% expressed ‘mild disagreement’ with this statement. Thus, the majority of participants affirmed their faith in the importance of the relationship between personal change and social change.
Chapter 3

Workshop participants engage in a Simulation on Reporting Armed Conflict at the 2004 Workshop titled Dialogic Engagement. Also seen, Mr. Ajai Shukla, Delhi-based journalist and columnist on strategic affairs and diplomacy who shared his experiences on conflict/war reporting with the participants.

Prof. Varun Sahni (Professor, International Politics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi) conducts a Simulation on Negotiations between the Indian and Pakistani Governments at the 2006 Workshop titled Collaborative Explorations.

Participants at the Ninth Annual Workshop titled Gender, Democracy, and Peacebuilding in South Asia: Ms. Kandala Singh (Consultant, International Center for Research on Women, New Delhi), Mr. Syed Ali Raza (Advocate, Lahore High Court), and Dr. Rubina Lone (Assistant Professor, Department of Microbiology, Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Medical College, Srinagar).

Pakistani participants Dr. Arshi Saleem Hashmi (Assistant Professor, Peace and Conflict Studies, National Defense University, Islamabad) and Ms. Faiza Mir (Lecturer, Department of International Relations, University of Balochistan, Quetta) in conversation with Workshop resource person Lt. Gen. B.S. Mallik (Former Indian Army Chief of Staff, Western Command, and President, Control Arms Foundation of India, New Delhi).
Chapter 3
Conflict Transformation and the Four Dimensions of Change

John Paul Lederach, in his elucidation of conflict transformation approaches (and their evaluation), foregrounds the central place that the pursuit of change—whether personal or social—holds. Postulating that a continuous engagement with the question of change is critical to the evaluation of conflict transformation efforts, he lists four dimensions of change. These capture the different levels at which conflict transformation is envisaged and provide a useful framework to evaluate change processes.

Personal change: By its very definition, conflict transformation suggests that change begins with the self. Conflict changes the way individuals see themselves and others, and influences their attitudes, perceptions, and behavior. Any effort to transform conflict must therefore begin at this fundamental level of individual change. This was a primary goal of the Conflict Transformation Workshops.

Relational change: At this level, ‘the focus is on the actual relationship patterns between individual people who interact’ and how this interaction affects the wider conflict setting. The assumption is that better communication and increased trust across fault-lines will have a multiplier effect, influencing larger groups of people.

Structural change: Efforts at this level seek to ‘impact institutions and wider social, political, or economic patterns’ and ‘represent broader, usually longer-term scope and impact’. Here, the foci of the change envisaged are the structural patterns and existing institutions/policies which hinder peaceful relations. In the context of India-Pakistan relations, both countries have, over the last 60 years, institutionalized the hostility by establishing specific patterns of conflict communication and following policies that inhibit contact—the bilateral visa agreement, for instance. Although conventional definitions of structural change point to improved systems of justice, rule of law, participatory governance institutions, power sharing agreements, etc., WISCOMP emphasized investment in more holistic and transformative conceptions of leadership as an important dimension of this level of change in India and Pakistan.

---

Cultural change: According to Lederach, ‘the cultural dimension refers to even deeper and often less conscious patterns related to conflict and peace...which are often very slow’. So, in addition to influencing government policies, how might youth leaders involved in a conflict transformation process affect change at the level of societal attitudes and cultural norms? A key emphasis here is on promoting cultural values that support conflict transformation efforts. For example, WISCOMP observed at the Workshops that there was a need to foreground, in the cultures of India and Pakistan, a greater sensitivity to the principles of gender equity, nonviolence, positive peace, and respect for people of different religions, ethnicities, and castes/classes.

This Chapter examines the impact of the Conflict Transformation Workshops through the Lederachian change lens, focusing on the personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions.34

3.1. Personal Change

A key characteristic of ‘conflict transformation’ as opposed to the frameworks of ‘conflict management’ and ‘conflict resolution’ is deep-rooted personal change that sustains even when conflict resurfaces. Such change is characterized by more positive attitudes towards ‘the other’ and a preference for dialogue (which includes the desire to listen to diverse viewpoints) when a crisis erupts. It also involves the practice of restraint, critical self-reflection, and the suspension of judgment. Did participants experience such change as a result of their participation in the Conflict Transformation Workshops?

Let us begin this exploration with a personal story from Ambreen Sehr Noon, a journalist from Lahore currently working with a leading news-daily in Dubai. Ambreen participated in two Conflict Transformation Workshops (Rehumanizing the Other in 2001 and Collaborative Explorations in 2006).

3.1.a. Finding Emancipation in the Heart of the Enemy35

*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*

34 Although the dialogues focused more on the personal and relational aspects of change, WISCOMP designed the curriculum and post-Workshop activities, bearing in mind the longer-term goals of structural and cultural change.

35 Ambreen Sehr Noon, ‘Finding Emancipation in the Heart of the Enemy’, *Closer to Ourselves* (New Delhi: WISCOMP, 2008), pp. 51–3. Ambreen visited India for the first time in June 2001 to participate in the First Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop. Then, a final-year student pursuing a Bachelors’ degree in Economics at Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, she felt the urge to return to the dialogue in 2006 to participate in the Fifth Annual Workshop, this time as a journalist working for a leading daily in the UAE. This story encapsulates her experiences at the WISCOMP Workshops in New Delhi.
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.

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 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...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, mosquitoes caused malaria. Even the people looked like me! I walked down its streets where women spoke the same language of motherhood, of chains, of dreams. The poverty that struck my people caused the same reaction here.

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 Siachen. Tit for Tat. Again and again.

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.

The experience of finding oneself ‘in the heart of the enemy’, which Ambreen’s story captured so eloquently, was a common leitmotif that wove together the post-Workshop reflections of several Indian and Pakistani alumni. Although Edward Said’s analysis that ‘the construction of identity involves establishing the other’ is often quoted in studies on identity and conflict, the Conflict Transformation Workshops unleashed an almost reverse process where, through an engagement with, and subsequent humanization of, ‘the other’, participants not only confronted themselves, but also altered their personal identity to a more ‘comfortable’ and ‘organic’ state of being.

For instance, Stuti Bhatnagar, a former member of the WISCOMP team, said: ‘The interactions with the Pakistani participants made me realize just how much my Punjabi identity—of which I had been unaware of all these years—had a bearing on my life.’ These conversations, which led to some very close cross-border friendships, helped Stuti to construct a more encompassing self-identity embedded in her family’s Punjabi roots, which hitherto lay buried under the veneer of religious identity. Echoing a similar sentiment, Indian participant Siddhartha Dave, Director (Strategic Partnerships), Milestone Communications, New Delhi, wrote the following in his post-Workshop reflection piece titled Jisne Lahore nahi dekha:
What followed [these dialogues] were a flurry of emotions and the breaking of stereotypes. What also followed was an understanding and discovery of India. Yes, the more I interacted with the Punjabis from Pakistan, the more I understood the north Indian psyche. From then on, I have been regularly interacting with friends across the Radcliff... Have regularly been discovering and re-discovering ‘Indianness’.

These journeys to ‘the other side’ thus provided a context for the discovery of self-identity, as well as the motivation to understand the needs of those perceived as ‘enemies’. Smriti Vij, a Kashmiri Pandit, whose father was displaced from Muzaffarabad after partition (following the horrifying experience of witnessing his own father’s murder during the 1947 raid) and from Srinagar in the early 1990s, talks about how the Workshop dialogues helped her to understand her parents’ experiences of displacement and loss:

Looking back, I now realize the deep personal impact of the Conflict Transformation Workshop 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 my family’s army background...For the first time, I began communicating with my parents about their life’s journey and how it affected my 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 realized also that—being the youngest member of my generation in a family displaced from Muzaffarabad—I had received many more opportunities to follow my ambitions. Most importantly, the journeys within have given me a sense of belonging to something beyond ‘home’. 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.36

These reflections were also accompanied by an empathy for the contemporary experiences of young Kashmiri Muslims—experiences that were often marked by a trauma similar to what Smriti’s father had endured in Muzaffarabad several years ago. As she put it, ‘Young eyes in Kashmir continue to grow up with a disproportionate share of horror. The trauma of conflict and displacement persists.’ For participants like Smriti, the Workshops created a space for experiences that went beyond the cerebral and that engaged the participants’ whole selves—the head and the heart; the

spiritual, the emotional, and the intellectual. India-Pakistan relations aside, for many it was this experience of finding a cathartic, inner peace that became etched in their memory as the most defining moment of the Conflict Transformation Workshops.

Also discernible in the post-Workshop reflections was a subtle movement away from certitudes. Whether with respect to their feelings about people from ‘the other’ country or their views on the causes of, and solutions to, the various conflicts between India and Pakistan, participants moved away from clear-cut yes/no, black/white positions to a space of maybes, of greys, of multiple truths—a space where judgment was suspended and where peace scholar Johan Galtung’s words came alive:

*A dialogue process is successful when the exclamatory mark at the end of our statement becomes a question mark.*

Although WISCOMP had envisaged personal change as an important dimension of the Conflict Transformation Workshops, it was surprised by the depth of the post-dialogue reflections, particularly those that highlighted self-discovery and a reformulation of identity based on encounters with ‘the other’. In fact, the endline study clearly revealed that the Workshops had initiated processes of deep-rooted personal change through which participants were able to transcend the worldview of *us* versus *them* and shift towards a collective consciousness of the power they held as a community of young peacebuilders.

Integral to this process was WISCOMP’s emphasis on creating a space where participants could listen to one another and, hopefully through this, question their own preconceived perceptions about ‘the enemy’. This emphasis became even more significant in light of the baseline research which had recorded the presence of very few avenues where such listening and truly dialogic processes between Indians and Pakistanis are prioritized; even though at a theoretical level, there is the recognition that enemy perceptions will transform only through such engagement. Sharing her reflections on this process, Asifa Hasan, a researcher from Islamabad currently pursuing a PhD in Energy and Environmental Policy at the University of Delaware, USA (and alumnus of the 2005 Workshop titled *Envisioning Futures*), said:

*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 the Conflict Transformation Workshops, society has been brought in. This is exactly what we need at this stage to break free of the biases of our forefathers harbored for generations, 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 military generals—will sit down to sort out the issues.\textsuperscript{37}

3.1.b. Individual Agency and Power

At the personal level, a big takeaway for the participants was the powerful idea that they can make a difference by sharing their workshop experiences with those in their circles of influence. It was also empowering for them to learn that they were ‘not the only ones thinking along these lines’. There was even excitement at the realization that many people in both India and Pakistan believe in the power of ordinary individuals to influence societies and institutions. For instance, Farooq Ahmad Dar, Lecturer, Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, stated:

\begin{quote}
My most valuable learning from the CT Workshop experience was the realization of 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 alone.
\end{quote}

Nadia Anjum, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, echoed a similar view, saying that the Workshop strengthened her faith in ‘the powerful role of the individual’. In this context, she declared her individual commitment to the cause of intercultural communication and peacebuilding between the two countries—irrespective of the political developments at the track one level.

Another important dimension of personal change, which found an articulation in the endline surveys, related to the participants’ reference to their identity as mothers and fathers. Since the Workshops in the second phase of the Program included an older group of participants (in their early-to-mid 30s), a good number of them came to the dialogues with a sensitivity to their identity as parents. Although the Conflict Transformation Workshops did not consciously seek to highlight this aspect of the participants’ identity, it was heartening for WISCOMP to see that several of them used their role as parents to inculcate new values and attitudes in their children in order to break the cycles of hate and fear, passed on from one generation to the next since 1947. In this context, many participants articulated the view that the time was now ripe to break free from the past and build a new kind of future for their children. They felt that as parents, it was their responsibility to transfer what they had learnt at the Workshops to their own children. To WISCOMP, they became symbols of immense

New understandings of peace

Through the Workshop experiences, participants formulated new and different understandings of peace. Some of these are shared here.

- Peace is characterized by respect and goodwill. A state of peace does not translate into an acceptance of the rival’s view or submission to the opponent’s demand; it means respect for ‘the other’ and her views.
  
  *Nausheen Wasi, Karachi*

- Peace is to lead a life without fear; to have the space to express oneself; it is not getting violated or violating others.

  *Ambereen Shah, New Delhi*

- Peace is living in an environment where you have the right to your own opinion and the duty to accept another’s, even if you do not agree with it.

  *Farooq Ahmad Dar, Islamabad*

- Peace is the cultivation of compassion. At the collective level, it is the creation of conditions that provide all individuals with the opportunities and skills to be the best they can be.

  *Sarojini Rao, Pune*

- In the context of India and Pakistan, peace, at a minimum, is 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. With the Conflict Transformation Workshops, personally, I feel that we have already started in that direction.

  *Asifa Hasan, Islamabad*

hope—hope in the power of investing in *one individual* and the impact of the attitudinal (and behavioral) changes in this *one individual* on his/her family and community.

In this respect, we share here a story by Gulalai Khan, a Communications Specialist with UNDP, Lahore (and alumnus of three Conflict Transformation Workshops). Gulalai’s first trip to WISCOMP—and to India—was in the summer of 2004. Like many of her co-participants from Pakistan, she entered the Workshop room experiencing a mix of fear and uncertainty about what would follow. In less than a span of 48 hours, she was surprised at how easily she was able to connect with the Indians at the Workshop and build common ground with them. In no time, the stereotype of the ‘crafty’ and ‘hegemon’ Indian diluted—and with it her own adversarial attitudes towards the country that was supposed to be ‘enemy number one’.
Although Gulalai’s take-away from the first two dialogues she attended (in 2004 and 2006) was professional and more academic in nature, the 2012 dialogue affected her at a more personal level. A primary reason was that she returned to the 2012 dialogue as a mother of two young boys. This new identity as a parent made her more conscious of the powerful role she could play by using her conflict transformation training to improve her own role as a parent and inculcate in her children the values of love, compassion, and coexistence, towards all. As a specific intervention, she decided to counter the hate and prejudice that some Pakistani children’s graphic novels contain about Indians and Hindus by re-storying these tales through a peacebuilding lens:

The first Conflict Transformation Workshop that I attended in 2004 transformed me, for life. It has been eight years now, and every year there is this yearning to go back to India and to the WISCOMP space to meet with Indians…I would like to share a story about the personal impact of the Workshops.

I am now a mother of two kids. Recently, my six-year old son was reading a children’s storybook. Soon, I discovered that the evil enemy in the story-plot was a Hindu. I immediately felt that this is not the kind of literature that

**Shedding 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…It appeared as if they were seeing an entirely new species on the other side! The expressions of the Pakistani and Indian people at this daily ceremony seemed to me to symbolize all the historical baggage we have learnt to carry since 1947…For me, 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 designs of the Workshop sessions. The non-judgmental atmosphere and the candid interactions made the participants open up. 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
Project Manager, USAID, Lahore
(Alumnus, 2001 & 2003 dialogues)
he should be reading. So I told him that I would narrate the story to him in my own words and took the book away from him. I did this not because of what I learnt in school, but because of the WISCOMP Workshops that I attended, which changed me forever. Since this incident, I have tried to teach my kids that patriotism or loving your country does not mean that you have to hate another country. It is about strengthening your own country and also strengthening relations with your neighbors.

3.1.c. Impact on career trajectories

This section highlights an important accomplishment of the Conflict Transformation Workshops, which was the participants’ decision to pursue higher education and professional development in the field of peacebuilding. We begin with the journeys of two participants—Zahid Shahab Ahmed from Pakistan and Shreya Jani from India:

When I came to the Workshop, I was merely a sociologist, an inactive, indirect peacemaker. My learning through the Workshop and through the Collaborative Research Award (through which I studied the attitudes of school teachers in India and Pakistan) guided me to pursue a Masters in Peace Education at the University for Peace, Costa Rica. Now, I am an ‘active’ peacemaker with practical work assignments in South Asia.

Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Assistant Professor, Center for International Peace & Stability, National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad

I carried with me the insights gained and techniques learnt at the Conflict Transformation Workshops to both my teacher training and my tenure as a middle-school history teacher...The friendships that I forged [with Pakistanis] has taught me a lot...about accepting and empathizing. They have helped me to challenge the notions one acquires without much exploration and thought; recognize the stereotypes that govern our lives; and, realize the need for critical thinking...These friendships are also largely responsible for my [professional] interest in educating for peace...I am thankful for the time spent at WISCOMP’s Conflict Transformation Workshop, which helped me to realize the importance of peace education.

Shreya Jani, Founder and Managing Trustee, Standing Together to Enable Peace Trust (STEP), New Delhi

Like Zahid and Shreya, the majority of participants came to the WISCOMP Workshops when they were in their early-to-mid 20s—an age when they were exploring their
passions and how best these could be converted into lucrative careers. As a result, the dialogues often proved to be a turning point in their lives—helping them to understand their own place in the world and acquire the skills and professional expertise to step into it with a real sense of purpose.

The one-on-one interactions with strangers who later became close friends and the personal journeys of self-discovery and learning transformed into passionate commitments to work professionally in support of the peace process between India and Pakistan. Up until the mid-to-late 2000s, the Conflict Transformation Workshops were the first point of contact with the field of peacebuilding for the majority of the Indian and Pakistani participants who had not been exposed to alternative ways of looking at peace and conflict issues, or had not realized how important conflict transformation was to their chosen professions. In fact, many made reference to the inter-disciplinary nature of peacebuilding—a learning that they considered to be very valuable since their own fields of study had not made these linkages when examining the interface between conflict, politics, and social change. For example, Nausheen Wasi, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi (and an alumnus of the 2003 Workshop titled Transcending Conflict), stated:

As a student of South Asian politics, I had not studied conflict transformation or any related area such as peace studies. I had not realized then that it was, in fact, complimentary to my field of study.

Participants not only learnt new concepts and analytical frameworks, but were also attracted to the altruistic assumptions of the field, which led to decisions to convert a personal (or often spiritual) interest in peacebuilding into a vocation. Many, as a result, decided to pursue post-graduate studies in peacebuilding or took up jobs with civil society/international organizations working on issues of peace and conflict. An Indian alumnus of the 2007 Workshop on Coexistence and Trust-building who worked at a Strategic Studies’ institute, shared with WISCOMP her decision to use the lens of Conflict Transformation to work on issues of peace and security:

---

38 Many alumni, in fact, began to see it as their ‘personal responsibility’ to engage with fellow citizens who saw ‘the other’ country as the ‘enemy’. Such moments would surface particularly in times of crisis—for instance, the Mumbai terror attacks in 2008, when many alumni came up with creative and constructive responses to the dominant discourse of aggressive and jingoistic nationalism.

39 The Workshop’s USP of introducing a new field of study reduced by the mid-2000s when both Pakistan and India witnessed a mushrooming of peace and conflict study centers at colleges and universities in Islamabad, New Delhi, and other cities.

40 WISCOMP provided letters of reference and other research-based support to alumni to help them pursue Masters and PhD degrees in peacebuilding.
The Workshop experience made me realize the importance of trust-building and the need for professional training to be able to influence change. It is in this context that I decided to pursue a Masters’ degree in Conflict Transformation.

Muna Baig, a Lahore-based lawyer specializing in human rights (and alumnus of three WISCOMP Workshops) shared the following:

I had enjoyed my WISCOMP experiences immensely, but I had not expected to be this influenced at an academic or professional level...The Conflict Transformation Workshops inspired me to focus more on [my] interests...in issues of peace and conflict....I realized that my real calling was in the humanitarian sector...I decided to delve deeper into these issues using a legal lens...and later qualified as a lawyer. 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 professional commitment to conflict transformation.

Muna’s dialogue partner from India, Soumita Basu, an Assistant Professor at South Asian University, New Delhi, credited the Workshops with introducing her to the field of conflict transformation and its interface with gender.

The Workshops were a tremendous learning experience. They gave me the confidence that research into issues of conflict and peace can make a difference to our lives as well as to the institutions we work with.

An Islamabad-based Pakistani alumnus who teaches coexistence to children shared the impact of the WISCOMP Workshop in the following words:

It was my very first Workshop of this kind and I never thought that conflict transformation tools and strategies can help bring people and nations closer together. After attending the WISCOMP Workshop, I decided to apply to other similar workshops to enhance my meager knowledge. Then the conflict situation within Pakistan also forced me to enter the field as we started facing violence from different sources on a daily basis. Now, I work with youth and children and teach them about peace, love, acceptance of ‘the other’, and coexistence with ‘the other’.

41 Since the baseline/endline surveys were confidential, the identity of the participants whose quotes are drawn from these questionnaires have been concealed. Where the quotes are drawn from published accounts such as Closer to Ourselves and the Workshop proceedings’ reports, the participant’s names have been shared.
Has your participation in the WISCOMP Workshops influenced your decision to work in your chosen field/profession?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indians</th>
<th>Pakistanis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the endline study conducted in 2013 revealed that the Workshops had influenced the career choices of 48% of the Indian participants and 50% of the Pakistani participants, a mid-term evaluation of the program in the year 2007 revealed figures that were much higher. The reason for this difference lay in an alteration that WISCOMP made to the screening process through which applicants were selected for the Workshops. With a purpose to be more strategic in its selection of participants, during the mid-term evaluation, WISCOMP decided to select individuals who were in their late-20s and early-to-mid-30s and had worked for a couple of years. Those applicants who had already demonstrated their leadership potential in their respective areas of specialization were selected to participate in the Workshops. Therefore, the professional profile of participants changed in the second half of the program (with fewer graduate students and entry-level practitioners attending the dialogues and a corresponding increase in the number of participants already pursuing post-graduate degrees in conflict resolution or working as mid-level researchers/practitioners with peacebuilding organizations).

Expectations also changed, as a result. Participants saw the Workshops as an opportunity to enhance skills, focus more on practice, and consolidate their work and learning through a reconnection with ‘theories from the field’ and an engagement with senior practitioners about the ‘state-of-the-field’. For instance, a peace journalist from Muzaffarabad stated: ‘The Workshop helped greatly to broaden my mental horizon, enhance my skills, and refresh my dedication to the work I do.’ An Indian respondent who was already working on conflict transformation issues when she attended the WISCOMP Workshop, shared: ‘The Workshop opened new avenues of people-to-people contact, bolstering my belief that civil society initiatives do work on the ground.’ What however remained unique even for this group of seasoned practitioners was the rare opportunity to meet people of their own age-group from across the border and to engage in a serious, structured, and sustained dialogue with them.

Participants who came with peacebuilding experience also offered their time and expertise to WISCOMP to conduct similar dialogues in their own organizations and cities. These have, in turn, generated new and exciting contexts through which the message and spirit of the Workshops have reached a wider cross-section of society in the two countries.
An exciting dimension of this intermeshing of personal and professional interests is that the Workshops have helped participants to find professional assignments that hold personal and social change processes in close relationship, and that therefore feel more like a calling than a job. As one Indian participant, paraphrasing theologian Frederick Buechner, put it: ‘The greatest vocation is where our passion meets the world’s greatest need. The Workshops helped me to find this balance.’

3.1.d. Identity Markers and Shifts in Participant Perceptions

Human identity is both personal and social. While it refers to how individuals define themselves, this description is closely linked to their relationship with other individuals. It is through this relationship that individuals develop a sense of belonging to a group. This connection is, in turn, linked to their own understanding of who they are and what is important to them. Amin Maalouf defines identity as ‘a shifting composite of a great number of different, often conflicting, allegiances and attachments, including those to one’s family, neighborhood, village, and country; to one’s religious, ethnic, linguistic, and racial group; and to one’s profession, political movement, among others. Identities are not static; they are made and remade during a person’s lifetime.’ In situations of protracted conflict, individuals gradually form attitudes about their self-identity and the identity of those perceived as a threat. Over time, these are constructed to fit into an ‘us versus them’ narrative where the attitudes and relationships between the different identities are set on a collision course.

In the context of India and Pakistan, these identities are complex because while Indians and Pakistanis share a common history, cultural heritage, and even familial and community ties, the political, religious, and territorial conflicts of the last six decades have led to the construction of national identities that are adversarial. Therefore, often, genuine attempts to listen to ‘the other’ side’s version of ‘the truth’ are received by co-citizens or peers as threatening to the core of self-identity. National identities are so polarized that any recognition of ‘the enemy’s’ version of ‘the truth’ or even cheering for ‘the other’ country in a cricket match could earn one the label of being traitorous.

An important goal of the Conflict Transformation Workshops has been to create a space where individuals can overcome these conditioned reflexes by exploring common ground and acknowledging ‘the truth’ that also exists in ‘the other’s’ version of the story. These, in turn, could perhaps lead to the construction of more positive,


43 In order to facilitate such processes, WISCOMP specifically used simulation exercises, role reversals, and active listening practice sessions.
fluid, and inclusive conceptions of the self and ‘the other’. In addition, integral to this effort has been the goal of building multiple and cross-cutting identities across the divisions of the various bilateral conflicts.44 Adversaries often exhibit the tendency to impose rigid, singular, and usually inferior conceptions of one another. The failure to recognize the complexity and the multi-dimensionality of ‘the self’ as well as ‘the other’ increases the risk of conflict since it becomes easier for individuals to see differences in terms of us versus them. At the Conflict Transformation Workshops, WISCOMP observed that markers of identities, which drew on categories such as profession/vocation, educational background, political affiliation, gender, and the participants’ membership to particular age-groups (in this case, the 20–35 age-group), emerged as cross-cutting identities, helping to build common ground between the Indians and Pakistanis.

We decided to engage more deeply with this issue by undertaking a study of the different ways in which participants prioritized their primary and secondary identities. Baseline and endline studies were conducted among the participants of the Workshops held in 2009, 2011, and 2012 to gauge their perceptions of the self and if any shifts in identity took place as a result of the interaction. Sixty-eight (out of a sample of 250) participants completed the pre- and post- Workshop questionnaires. They were asked to rate those components of identity that were important to them, using three categories of gradation: ‘not important’ (the respondent did not have any feeling of attachment towards this marker of identity); ‘sometimes important’ (this identity mattered sometimes, depending on time and context, but the respondent would not defend it); and, ‘extremely important’ (it mattered immensely and the respondent would always defend this marker of identity).

The politics of ideology is simultaneously a politics of otherization, for our identity is defined vis-à-vis the other. The process of otherization is reinforced by the politics of history that interprets this identity formation and assigns it to the hallways of the past where it becomes unalterable, sacrosanct. 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.

Anisha Kinra & Seema Sridhar Peace and Security Researchers (Alumni, 2005 Workshop)

44 Markers of identities that draw on categories such as age (a sense of belonging to a particular generation), education, vocation, and even political affiliation are vital to processes of conflict transformation because these can emerge as cross-cutting identities that connect individuals across conflict fault-lines.
Primary markers of identity: The majority of Pakistani respondents—over 55%—stated that their family identity, national identity, religious identity, and professional affiliation were ‘extremely important’. However, a comparison of the baseline and endline questionnaires revealed that those who felt that nationality and religion were ‘not important’ increased from 6.2% to 10.1% and 18.7% to 33.3% respectively. The Indian respondents (over 60%) spoke in unison with respect to the ‘extreme importance’ of three sources of identity—political affiliation, level of education, and family. With reference to other aspects of identity, there was a shift towards ‘sometimes important’ or ‘not important’.

Multiple identities: A comparison of the ways in which participants rated their primary and secondary identities revealed a common pattern: they shifted from the ‘extremely important’ category in the pre-Workshop questionnaires to the more neutral and context-driven category ‘sometimes important’ in the post-Workshop questionnaires. There was an awareness that the significance of identities based on gender, religion, ethnicity, class, caste, profession, political affiliation, and even nationality depends on the time, space, and context. It was also observed that post their attendance at the Workshop, participants shifted away from water-tight conceptions of the self.

Family identity: Family identity was perhaps the only marker where participants—Indians and Pakistanis—shifted from ‘sometimes important’ or ‘not important’ to ‘extremely important’. Although it is difficult to identify reasons for the increase in the significance accorded to family identity, one inference could perhaps be that many participants (in the post-Workshop questionnaires) made reference to the sessions on inner, individual-level peace, which were based on the belief that ‘peace begins within the home’. This created a context for them to initiate conversations with their parents, spouses, and others at home about conflicts that were shoved under the veneer of normalcy. For example, many such conversations related to issues...
arising out of gender inequality within the four walls of the home. A second explanation could be linked to the fact that the Workshops sparked a curiosity in many participants to explore their family roots, which invariably lay on ‘the other’ side of the border. This, in turn, led to the initiation of new conversations with their parents and grandparents and a more holistic sense of family history across generations.

**Caste identity:** Caste was not considered to be a primary marker of identity. Although it is closely related to other categories such as class and sect, participants were hesitant to see it as a reference point in the formulation of their own identity. However, at one Workshop, a graduate student from Lahore invited her co-delegates to engage with this question more deeply: ‘Are there not separate entrances and separate utensils for the domestic help in our homes? Don’t they come from a particular section of our society?’ This led to a discussion on the prevalence of the caste system, both in India and Pakistan, albeit in different forms and with different nomenclatures.

Among the Indians, the endline survey recorded an increase in the number of respondents who perceived caste identity as ‘not important’ along with a simultaneous decrease in those who saw it as ‘sometimes important’. None of the respondents saw it as ‘extremely important’, in the baseline or in the endline. More insights into this marker of identity came from a question on the importance of economic status as a marker of identity. Linking economic status to caste, participants showed a greater awareness of, and sensitivity to, how class serves as a divider and often as a source for the perpetuation of discrimination in the Indian context. The percentage of Indian respondents who saw their class identity as ‘extremely important’ reduced and there was a simultaneous increase in the number of those felt that economic status was not an important source of their identity.

**National identity:** The location of national identity at the Pakistani respondents’ core sense of self was observed in the endline survey with 55.6% seeing their national identity as ‘extremely important’. Comments made by two Pakistani respondents, which also reflect the tenor of the majority of their co-citizens’ perceptions, are shared here to illustrate this point:

*Pakistan is my country. I love Pakistan, but I am very upset with the religious extremism and military dominance of the political system. Pakistani people are very loving and very hard-working.*

A second participant stated:

*Pakistanis are committed to their country and its wellbeing against all odds. Pakistanis aspire to get a respectable place in the comity of nations. Notwithstanding some extremist elements which want to defame the country,*
the society by and large has a moderate approach in everything. Pakistanis are ready to give every kind of sacrifice for the welfare of their country. When in difficult times, they let go of all their religious, political, and economic differences which otherwise keep them divided into hostile groups.

Such responses were missing from the Indian questionnaires. The Indian participants were less certain about the significance of their national identity with 14.5% saying that it was ‘extremely important’ in the endline study (a 10% decline from baseline). Correspondingly, the percentage of Indians who saw nationality as ‘not important’ increased from 8.3% to 12.5%. The majority, thus, chose to see national identity as ‘sometimes important’, its significance influenced by context, time, and space. The Indian participants’ hesitation to strongly identify with their national identity is, in fact, a pattern that WISCOMP has observed since the First Workshop in 2001. The following quote from an Indian participant reflects the general view among the majority of the Indian respondents:

It’s really hard to think of Indians as one monolithic group. We differ from region-to-region, religion-to-religion, class-to-class, and caste-to-caste. A person from the northeast might be glad if he/she can get through the day in a metropolitan city without being subjected to racial slur; a Dalit from Punjab would be happy if socioeconomic equality were a given in society. The Indian middle class might back Anna Hazare, but it will not give a second thought to the coolies and rickshaw pullers outside his [Hazare’s] rallies who are made to feel unwelcome at these public meetings.45

The disaggregated data revealed that the responses of the Kashmiri participants were distinct. For greater clarity on the ‘national identity’ perceptions of the Kashmiri respondents, WISCOMP decided to read the quantitative and qualitative data together (drawing on participant comments from the questionnaires). Since Kashmiri respondents came from Muzaffarabad and Srinagar, as well as from Islamabad and Delhi, they interpreted ‘national identity’ and ‘ethnic identity’ in similar and different ways. For example, while many, though not all, Kashmiris from the Pakistani side defined their ‘ethnic/regional identity’ as Kashmiri, those from the Indian side described their ‘national identity’ as Kashmiri. A respondent from Gilgit-Baltistan defined her nationality as Pakistani; yet, participants from Muzaffarabad (who continue to live there) defined their nationality as Kashmiri. In contrast, those hailing from Muzaffarabad but now living in Islamabad, defined their nationality as Pakistani or

45 Due to the paucity of space, WISCOMP has not included the full report of the Indian and Pakistani participants’ perceptions on national identity. The report is available on request.
both ‘Pakistani and Kashmiri’. A young peacebuilder from Muzaffarabad (currently working with a grassroots’ social movement in Islamabad) talked about his ‘ethnic identity’ as a Kashmiri which, over the years, had been subsumed by the dominant narratives of nationalism and state identity. He stated that the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop had helped him to ‘reconnect with his Kashmiri roots’:

My Kashmiri identity has played second fiddle to my primary identity of being a Pakistani national. At the Conflict Transformation Workshop, however, I felt a strong pull towards my Kashmiri ethnicity and a desire to connect with other Kashmiri participants (particularly those on the Indian side).46

Participants from the Kashmir Valley (on the Indian side) saw their nationality as ‘Kashmiri’ and considered it to be their primary identity. This was reflected in the quantitative data wherein 68.6% stated that their ‘Kashmiri nationality’ was ‘extremely important’. Or, as a young woman from Srinagar (currently pursuing her PhD in Delhi) stated: ‘Apart from what I am forced to write on [passport] documents, as a Kashmiri, I consider my nationality disputed.’ Another Kashmiri researcher from Srinagar talked about how the collective struggle of a people can influence their individual identities. He described it in the following words, ‘It instills in the individual an inherent, deep relationship with the land, which even forces many overseas nationals to return to their homeland.’

Other important markers of identity for the Kashmiri respondents were family, vocation, economic status, and gender identity (for the female respondents). The baseline-endline comparison showed a shift from the ‘extremely important’ to the ‘sometimes important’ categories for various markers of identity and the awareness that identities are context-driven and an amalgam of many different experiences and situations.

**Religious identity:** It was observed that participants often came to the Workshops with the expectation that there would be a ‘clash of differing religious identities’ or a confrontation arising out of the divergent civilizational worldviews that Indians and Pakistanis were supposed to represent. The fact that this ‘clash’ did not happen at the Workshops came as a surprise to them. On the contrary, they were struck by the ease with which they could relate with one another and identify (quite substantially) with each other’s culture, despite the differing national and religious identities. In ways that appeared organic and unplanned, they built relationships by focusing on the

46 While this participant had considered his ethnic identity (Kashmiri) to be ‘not important’ in the baseline questionnaire, his Kashmiri identity was ranked as ‘important’in the endline questionnaire.
common identities they did share, for instance those of ethnicity (Punjabi and Sindhi, in particular) and profession (school or college educators, journalists, financial analysts, lawyers, et al).

**Gender identity**: About 40% of the Indian female respondents and 43.3% of the Pakistani female respondents saw their gender identity as ‘extremely important’. The disaggregated data revealed that 97.5% of the Kashmiri female respondents saw their gender identity as ‘extremely important’ in the endline study. However, the majority of the male respondents (Indian, Pakistani, and Kashmiri) perceived their own gender identity as ‘not important’ and, in fact, saw the Workshop sessions on gender as synonymous with advocacy for women’s rights (with men having a limited role to play). There was also hesitation among the male respondents to talk about what women in their own homes were allowed to do and not do.

There was, however, a sizeable minority of male respondents (about 20%) who were conscious of their gender identity, but this was due to the ‘unrealistic expectations that society imposed’ on them. Reflecting the angst of a good number of male participants who had chosen teaching/academia as a profession, a school educator from Mumbai shared the following sentiment:

> I sometimes find gender expectations quite oppressive. As a 27-year old male with two post-graduate degrees and a range of work experience, I am expected to hold a high-profile job with a hefty pay packet and a beautiful wife to boast of, particularly one chosen by my parents from within the community. I resist succumbing to these expectations because my priorities are different, but I constantly feel pressurized by family in terms of these matters.

Female participants, Pakistani and Indian, said that they were conscious of their gender identity, which they experienced as being under threat (and hence a significant marker). For example, an Islamabad-based researcher stated that since she had faced challenges because of her gender identity, it had made that aspect ‘more pronounced’.

A 25-year-old peacebuilder from Lahore added:

> Facing challenges based on my gender has accentuated this aspect of my identity, making me more defensive. I feel that I need to stand up and protect my identity as a woman.
A communications professional from the same city talked about how such experiences of gender insecurity can be ‘depressing’, but they had further strengthened her ‘values and gender identity’. A political worker from Karachi echoed a similar view:

*I place my gender, education, and profession as top priorities. I have become very cautious in relationships and very independent. I am ‘me’ primarily, not daughter, wife or sister of anyone...This is why I married the guy I married. He acknowledged my individuality.*

An educator from Peshawar added:

*First, I feel a sense of insecurity due to my gender as our society is male-dominated. Being a woman, one has to always be careful. This sense of insecurity causes a lack of confidence. Sometimes, one can’t even defend oneself despite being on the right side. Second, being a Pukhtun, my identity due to my race and location...I feel fear and insecurity. The world has a distorted image of Pukhtuns and equates them with ‘terrorists’. So, one feels uneasy and insecure like many other Pukhtuns.*

Indian female respondents shared similar views. As one of them put it:

*Most of the time, I have had to undergo unpleasant experiences because of my gender. Thinking twice about stepping out late at night is just one of the most commonly-felt anxieties. I have tried to overcome my insecurity by dressing and behaving in an ‘unwomanly’ manner.*

Another Indian participant added:

*My insecurities relate to my identity as a woman, which makes me mind my P’s and Q’s more than I would like to in public. However, in a relatively secure surrounding, I voice my objections to the stereotypes louder than I would normally do, by questioning the social order.*

The reflections of the female participants brought home the reality that although many of the Workshop sessions focused on the ‘mainstreaming’ of women’s perspectives and experiences in situations of social/political conflict, there is also a need to respond to the growing incidence of violence against women in ostensibly ‘peaceful’ cities (such as Delhi and Lahore). What also came out of these reflections was the ominous presence of threat and discrimination that women respondents (Pakistani and Indian) have to deal with within the four walls of their homes. The key questions that came up in this context were: How should the Conflict Transformation Workshops respond to this reality? How can the dialogues help women to feel safe on the streets of their cities or resist psychological violence within their own homes?
Identity and threat: The relationship between identity and threat emerged as an important theme that influenced the hierarchy of identity markers. This was particularly visible in the responses of participants who came from regions experiencing social and political violence. In the baseline and endline questionnaires, WISCOMP asked participants if they had experienced fear or insecurity because of their identity, and whether this experience had affected the way they defined their identity (and even ‘the other’). Although the manifestation and interpretation varied, there was consensus on the fact that participants were ‘very conscious’ of those markers of identity that they perceived as being under threat.

A researcher from the Northeast of India pointed to the predominance of her ethnic/regional identity over her identity as a woman since the former was under constant threat in Delhi (where she currently lived):

The fact that I belong to the north-eastern region of India became very apparent in my interactions with people from outside the northeast. As a student in Delhi, the absolute lack of knowledge of the people regarding the northeast was quite appalling. What I found very irritating was not so much their apparent lack of knowledge but the fact that they chose not to know about the people and the culture of this region...As a student in one of the premier institutions of India, I was taken aback when fellow students asked me if I needed a passport to go home or if there were any Hindus in Assam! These experiences have made me acutely aware of who I am and where I come from. This constant awareness has had an impact on the person I am today.
The views of the Kashmiri participants with respect to the relationship between identity and threat also deserve mention here. In response to the question, ‘Have you ever experienced a sense of fear, threat, or insecurity because of your identity’, 75% Kashmiri women and 60% Kashmiri men said ‘yes’. About 50% (both men and women) said that this experience had affected the way they defined their identity. However, the manifestation of this experience varied. Some exhibited the tendency to conceal those aspects of identity that could expose the respondent to threat (or some form of insecurity). For example, a Kashmiri participant who moved to Delhi (from Srinagar) to pursue a Masters’ degree in peacebuilding shared that as a result of his relocation to the national capital, he now conceals some aspects of his Kashmiri identity. As he put it,

*My political affiliations are a very important part of my identity. But most of the time, I have to maintain a low profile vis-à-vis my political affiliations in Delhi…At times, I don’t disclose my religious and Kashmiri identity…And I either hide or change the way I define what I believe in.*

A journalist from Muzaffarabad expressed a similar sentiment:

*In Pakistan, when I present myself as a Kashmiri who has a different identity from Pakistanis, some people feel offended. It is considered by some officials as being ‘anti-Pakistan’…They don’t like that Kashmiris should declare themselves as a ‘separate identity’. Consequently, I could be rejected if I qualify for a public sector job. Here, it is important to mention that according to the laws of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, during the commencement of the job, every employee has to declare that he or she believes in the ‘accession to Pakistan’. In other words, if I don’t follow this political belief, I cannot obtain any job in the public sector [in Pakistan]….So, sometimes, I have to censor my own views on certain issues due to the fear of possible outcomes.*

However, some Kashmiri participants responded differently, expressing a resolve to not compromise on those aspects of identity that were important to them. They became more defensive and bold in the articulation of their Kashmiri identity, even if this invited threat. For instance, a grassroots peacebuilder currently based in Islamabad (but hailing from Muzaffarabad) said:

*I have experienced threat because of my views on religion and politics, but this has strengthened my commitment to my beliefs and values.*
A researcher from Rawalakot, currently pursuing a PhD in Islamabad, noted:

*The protracted conflict of J&K has left the people confused about their identity. So, they try to adjust, readjust, and modify according to the environment.*

There was, however, a broad consensus among the respondents that the conflict had made them ‘conscious’ of their Kashmiri identity ‘all the time’.

In conclusion, the endline study revealed that adversarial attitudes towards ‘the other’ identities (reflected in the use of words such as ‘aggressor’, ‘hegemon’, ‘dishonest’, and ‘crafty’) were replaced by perceptions wherein participants talked about the need to:

- Exercise restraint and suspend judgment;
- Make a genuine effort to acknowledge the ‘truth’ in the adversary’s story and understand their experiences; and
- Shed notions of the superiority of one’s own identity vis-à-vis ‘the other’.

There was also a dilution of the fears and apprehensions about meeting ‘the other’ (which a good number of respondents had shared in the baseline questionnaires). These were replaced by cross-border friendships, which led to the creation of new peace partnerships and networks. The next section on Relational Change explores the nature and outcome of these cross-border relationships.
3.2. Relational Change

Simple and obvious as it may seem, one of the most significant shifts in the area of relational change came in the form of the discovery that common people on ‘the other’ side of the border are just as ‘human’, ‘friendly’, and ‘trust-worthy’ as those on one’s own side! For instance, the following comment by an Indian researcher sums up the initial reaction of many Workshop participants (from India):

*Pakistanis are regular, normal and, if anything, warmer! They wish the same things for themselves that we do for ourselves—happiness, security, and prosperity.*

Building bridges with ‘the other’ was a central leitmotif that strung together the diverse experiences of the Workshop participants and which, later, found resonance in many of their chosen vocations. Post-Workshop surveys were replete with alumni making commitments to engage with people within their circles of influence to ‘shed unfounded biases and prejudices’. There was an abundance of the articulation of respect, admiration, and affection for peers across the border as well as the commitment that the relationships will be sustained beyond the context of the Workshops. In fact, the paradox of how one could experience intense affection towards a nationality that was considered to be ‘the other’ was a common theme in the post-Workshop responses.

A good number of participants also built mentoring relationships with senior trainers/resource persons from across the border. Commenting on the relationship built with an Indian resource person, which sustained beyond the Workshops, Maria Gulraize Khan, Strategic Planning Specialist at the Education Development Center, Lahore (and alumnus of two dialogues), said:

*It is rare to find people today who you could look up to and admire for their vision, ideals, and integrity; those who are at peace with themselves and willing to share their wisdom with the world. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have met such leaders at the Conflict Transformation Workshops.*

That these ‘leaders’ were citizens of ‘the other’ country was no longer an issue for the participants. Hooma Rehman, a post-graduate student of International Relations from Islamabad, felt that the WISCOMP Workshop had given her hope that there were women in South Asia who could serve as role-models for young scholars like herself. This, she felt, was the biggest takeaway for her.

However, in the context of the broader goal of social change, the key question that WISCOMP sought to address in the evaluation was this: How would the personal bonds of friendship transform into wider cross-border strategic relationships with the power to influence social change?
The following section on *Relational Change* engages with this question. But first, a word about the challenges posed by processes that have generated deep-rooted prejudices.

**3.2.a. Confronting Prejudice: A Gentle Knock on the Doors of Perception**

The engagement with prejudice was an important component of the Workshop curriculum. Prejudice can be found in every walk of life and influences relationships between individuals—even when they happen to be the foreign secretaries and the army chiefs of India and Pakistan. The roots of prejudice lie in nationalism, culture, religion, education, socialization, history, and the media, and its purpose, often, is to pin the blame for all that is wrong on ‘the other’.

A survey of the pre- and post-Workshop questionnaires administered among the Indian and Pakistani participants revealed that they came to the dialogue with two general expectations: one, to meet youth from across the border; and two, to learn practical skills and techniques for handling conflict situations. However, what was also recorded was the persistent presence of the view that ‘the other’ cannot be trusted and that any positive moves from ‘the other side’ should be received with caution and even suspicion. There were also some participants who felt that while they had no hard feelings towards the ‘people of the other country’, they were skeptical of its ‘politicians, bureaucracy, military, and media’.

A young faculty member from a college in Lahore who participated in two of the WISCOMP dialogues shared,

> My first trip to India was to attend the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop in 2005. I went to Delhi with doubts and skepticism, mostly because I was told by senior faculty [at our college] to be on my guard and to watch out for ‘underlying agendas’—‘Indian designs of influencing the youth of Pakistan’. Why else would the Indians [WISCOMP] be spending so much money on our travel and accommodation? I was expecting heated debates with attacks on each other’s weak points, even though, ironically, we were going to attend a workshop on conflict transformation.

> These expectations were, gladly, not met. On the contrary, to my surprise, it was like finding a second home as the warmth, hospitality, and respect

---

47 This title is derived from an essay written by Workshop alumni Seema Sridhar and Anisha Kinra titled ‘First Steps and Giant Leaps’ in the book *Closer to Ourselves* (New Delhi: WISCOMP, 2008), which documents experiences of personal and relational change that the Conflict Transformation dialogues initiated.
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. The discussions were open, frank, and interactive. There were hardly any direct attacks. If there were, they were due to ignorance.

In the opening session of the Workshop, Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath said that there would be no talk of ‘...if Pakistan were to become a part of India again...’, and I heaved a sigh of relief. Because this is exactly what I have heard from so many Pakistanis who have interacted with Indians...where Indians grumble that partition should not have taken place and wish for a day when the two countries would merge again.

A male researcher from Islamabad, who had encountered prejudice on a separate visit to India\(^48\) prior to the WISCOMP Workshop, added:

*I came to the Workshop thinking it would be a boxing match and I would have to roll up my sleeves and defend my country—Pakistan...We would have to present our arguments and find loopholes in the points made by 'the other'. On the contrary, I realized that everyone had come to the dialogue with a will to work collaboratively towards a better understanding of each other’s viewpoints, fears, and ways of thinking.*

A development practitioner from Lahore, reflecting on her experiences (five years after the two WISCOMP Workshops she attended), shared the following sentiment:

*The most palpable change that came about in the years that followed my participation in the Conflict Transformation Workshops of 2001 and 2003 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...I realized that all Indians are not anti-Pakistan...The threat perceptions simply faded.***

While perceptions changed on both sides, it seemed that the attitudinal shifts among the Indians were greater—perhaps because they came to the Workshops with relatively

\(^48\) This participant shared that while some Indians were friendly, what he remembered vividly about his earlier visit to India was that someone called him a ‘relative of Ajmal Kasab’. This had embittered him, influencing his perceptions of Indians as well as his expectations from the WISCOMP Workshop.
less information about the ground reality in Pakistan. In comparison, the Pakistani participants exhibited a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Indian society. Perhaps, this could be attributed to the presence of Bombay cinema and Indian entertainment TV channels, which are fairly popular in Pakistan. Commenting on this, 2005 Workshop alumnus Asifa Hasan (a researcher from Islamabad currently pursuing a PhD from the University of Delaware, USA) said:

*While Indians know that Pakistan doesn’t really have democracy, they have no idea about the active and vibrant peoples’ movements that are underway...Also, we know more about the Indian youth than they know about us. I attribute this to the strength of the Indian media in projecting Indians and the weakness of the Pakistani media in projecting Pakistanis. I noticed that GEO and ARY are not aired in many parts of India, and PTV World does not really do justice to Pakistanis.*

From general Pakistani observations on how Indian participants were ‘ill-informed about Pakistan’ to the more specific comments such as, ‘Indians perceive Pakistani society to be extremist where women are uneducated and largely restricted to their homes’, there was the perception that Indian participants did not know ‘the real Pakistan’—particularly the complexity of the country’s political and social dynamics.

Many, though not all, participants did exhibit a tendency to dwell on the predominance of the military, women without rights, and extremism in Pakistan. For example, Rajeshwari Shankar (a social science teacher at Delhi Public School, Bathinda, Punjab) was surprised when the Pakistani women at the 2004 Workshop titled *Dialogic Engagement* did not match up to her stereotype of them:

*Shock jolted me when I first saw the women participants from Pakistan. They were sporting short, bright kurtis, impeccable make-up, and fashionably colored hair. I was taken aback. Of course, I did not expect them to be clad in burkhas. Nevertheless, I must confess, neither did I imagine them in trendy clothing. To be honest, the next thought that crossed my mind was this: these women were here to party; perhaps they would not be able to speak anything sensible during the Workshop. Well, during the course of the weeklong dialogue, not only was I forced to change my opinion about them, but I also came to admire their intelligence and ability to articulate their points of view. This, then, was my introduction to one of the most amazing groups of Pakistani women.*

Participants also came to the dialogue with positive stereotypes about ‘the other’. For instance, a majority held the belief that the youth of India and Pakistan had much in common, particularly with respect to how they saw their futures as intertwined.
This perception was reinforced by the strong friendships they forged during the course of the dialogues. Second, participants who came from ‘partition families’ exhibited deep affection for the city that was once home to their ancestors—whether Lahore, Karachi, or Peshawar for the Indians or Delhi, Bombay, or Chennai for the Pakistanis.

The Workshop experiences demonstrated that when youngsters from the two sides meet in the context of a structured dialogue process, they become votaries for peace and coexistence. For instance, in the post-Workshop surveys, the Indian participants expressed greater hesitation to ‘paint all Pakistanis with the same brush’. A narrow, singular perception was replaced with a multiplicity of positive images about ‘the other’.49 There was a more nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences and different political views of the people of Pakistan. There was also greater sensitivity to the reality that Pakistani civilians are victims of terrorism as well and are struggling to grapple with different forms of sectarian and extremist violence.

After they returned home, these new relationships remained integral to the alumni’s work for peace in the region. The litmus test, however, lay in their behavioral responses when conflict resurfaced at the broader societal level. For instance, the Mumbai terror attacks in November 2008 tested the resilience of this network in a way that no one had anticipated. With processes of ‘otherization’ intensifying in both countries and the political class and mainstream media beating the drums of war, it was evident that the clock had, once again, been set back. At the broader societal level, it appeared that Indians and Pakistanis were back to the drawing board with respect to the progress made in building trusting relationships. In this context, WISCOMP wondered how the Workshop alumni would respond. What happened in the days and weeks following the Mumbai attacks surprised even the most optimistic of us.

There was a flurry of activity on the Workshop e-groups. The Indian and Pakistani alumni used blogs, emails, and online social media (Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and others) to establish direct contact with one another, thereby accessing diverse narratives and experiences. Amidst the blame game and war mongering that engulfed the two countries, they reached out to one another and took a joint position against all forms of terror and organized violence—irrespective of their source or rationale. The Pakistani alumni were unequivocal in their support to the Indian alumni, urging

49 For example, Chintan Girish Modi, a Mumbai-based school teacher, referring to his Pakistani friends, said: ‘They represent a Pakistan that most Indians don’t know. They live in a society that is often dismissed as traditional, orthodox, and unworthy of being engaged with. In their little choices, however, they resist becoming just what they are expected to be, in matters of gender, food, and faith.’
them to ignore what their governments and media were projecting. The Indian alumni too expressed solidarity with their Pakistani friends, refusing to follow the majority diktat of ‘painting all Pakistanis with the same brush’. The trust and relationships built at the WISCOMP Workshops endured even when the governments floundered in their public statements and reactions to the Mumbai tragedy.

Shared here are two of the many emails that WISCOMP and the Indian alumni received from the Pakistani alumni and resource persons in the days and weeks following the attacks. Baela Jamil, a Lahore-based educator (and Workshop resource person) wrote in an email to WISCOMP,

*The [Conflict Transformation] Workshops are needed now more than ever and please do not feel for a moment that this current state of frenzy reflects the mood of the people, but only of those vested interests who want to distract attention from the core issues within.*

Khadija Amjad, a Project Manager with USAID in Lahore (and alumnus of the 2001 and 2003 dialogues) shared the following sentiment with WISCOMP, via email:

*I find myself at a loss for words that will deliver my true feelings [about the Mumbai attacks]. Please know that I stand with each and every one of you and [with] all Indians. No person in their right mind on any side of the border would ever find such nonsense to be acceptable in any way. A tragedy like this only strengthens my resolve to never give in to these bigots. I wish there was a quick way to deal with them, for all our sakes.*

An important factor that helped to sustain the trust between the Indian and Pakistani alumni during those turbulent days was an intimate and nuanced understanding of individuals who they once knew only as members of an enemy nation. This gave the alumni the confidence to reach out to ‘the other’ group, knowing well that such a step would invite criticism from family and friends on their side of the border.

In their communication with each other (and with WISCOMP), they talked about the need to listen, to resist stereotyping, and to increase cross-border contact (rather than shutting down communication channels as was done in the wake of the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001). This is however not to suggest that the alumni, especially the Indians, suppressed their feelings of anger and sadness in order to continue the dialogue with the Pakistanis. They were in fact fairly honest about how they felt. Where they differed from many other Indians was in their decision to express their feelings of anger and sadness without branding *all* Pakistanis as ‘extremists’. They made a conscious choice *not* to label or stereotype the people of Pakistan as ‘supporters of terror’. They were also clear in their view that the suspension of the
government-level composite dialogue and other forms of cross-border contact would achieve little; rather, these would take the two countries further away from the goal of sustainable peace and security.

Even though it was encouraging to see the resilience of the alumni relationships post-26/11, there was the recognition of a renewed hostility outside of this conflict transformation network. Inside of this network too, the post-Mumbai scenario presented new challenges. For instance, there were some alumni who felt that the Mumbai attacks had made the exercise of trust-building exceedingly difficult, and that perhaps WISCOMP was being too idealistic by continuing to believe in the power of cross-border relationships to effect constructive social change between the two countries. It would also be incorrect to say that all the Indian and Pakistani participants who changed their attitudes towards ‘the other’ were able to sustain this positive shift in the weeks and months following the Mumbai attacks. Some did succumb to the dominant political and media rhetoric that focused on one-upmanship and aggrandizement. For example, a former Indian army officer, who attended the 2003 Workshop (which was held in the shadow of Operation Parakram) felt that although the WISCOMP dialogue had helped him to understand the Pakistanis, he was skeptical of the chances of peace because, as he put it, ‘the anti-India glue which holds Pakistan together is very strong’. A Mumbai-based broadcast journalist who participated in the Inaugural Workshop in 2001 (when he was pursuing a post-graduate degree in Mass Communication in Delhi), had shared the following sentiment with WISCOMP at the end of this dialogue: ‘The other has been humanized and through this process, the self has been transformed.’ Yet, as a television journalist reporting the Mumbai attacks seven years later, his views on the possibilities for peace changed drastically. Doubting the ability of cross-border relationships to build long-term peace and security, he felt that the only solution now was for the Indian state to improve its intelligence-gathering capacity, do a better job of guarding its land and sea borders, and focus on internal security.

Reflecting a similar deficit of hope, a Lahore-based communications professional (who had participated in two WISCOMP dialogues) shared the following sentiment, post-26/11:

Having had Indian friends as a child [in Abu Dhabi], I never had a myopic view of ‘the other’. However post-Mumbai, the hostile exchanges seen all over the Indian and Pakistani news channels have made me question the chances for reconciliation between the two countries.
3.2.b. Prejudice and Social Distance: Bridging the Divides

Even though some participants expressed uncertainty about the possibilities for coexistence, it was reassuring to see that the ‘social distance’, which the Workshops had succeeded in bridging, did not increase in the wake of crises such as 26/11. This was observed not just between the Indians and Pakistanis, but also between Hindus and Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits in India. On the whole, participants did feel closer to members of ‘the other’ country/community and developed more positive attitudes towards them. Although several factors facilitated (and sustained) this positive shift, WISCOMP can say with some surety that a primary reason was ‘the meeting point’, ‘the space of trust’, ‘the context for dialogue’ that the Workshops offered to the participants to engage with ‘the other’s’ worldviews and narratives.

This section presents a summary of the findings of the ‘social distance survey’ that was administered among the Workshop participants, engaging specifically with those factors that helped to bridge the myriad divides. The social distance scale was included in both the baseline and endline questionnaires and attempted to gauge the participants’ feelings towards different groups, based on religion and nationality. For instance, a significant indicator of change towards ‘the other’ were the survey questions that
asked participants how far they were willing to step out of their comfort zones to befriend (or even marry) someone from a different religious community or nationality. Would an ‘Indian Hindu’ wish to be close friends with a ‘Pakistani Muslim’? Or, would a ‘Kashmiri Muslim’ be willing to have an ‘Indian Atheist’ as a neighbor? Or, what kind of interaction would a ‘Pakistani Muslim’ be willing to have with a Pakistani Hindu, and did this change from baseline to endline? The baseline and endline responses of the participants were compared to investigate any positive or negative shifts towards members of the ‘out-group’ (and in-group). Figure 3.1 shows the various categories of social distance on the basis of which respondents were asked to share their feelings towards different religious and national groups. Figures 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 highlight the positive shifts in perceptions with respect to how respondents saw members of ‘the other’ nationality and religion/s.

A reading of the positive shifts in perceptions (as shown in Figures 3.2 to 3.4) confirms WISCOMP’s assumption that ignorance (owing to the absence of communication) leads to social distance, which in turn increases prejudice about ‘the other’. However, if individuals are given an opportunity to enter into a ‘space of sustained dialogue’ with ‘the other’, it doesn’t take long for humanization processes to take root and for mutual respect to be built.

## Figure 3.2: Positive shifts in inter-community/inter-state perceptions: A comparison of Pakistani responses from baseline to endline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Baseline (B)</th>
<th>Endline (E)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani respondents open to ‘marrying’ Indian Hindus</td>
<td>B:22%</td>
<td>E:44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistanis open to being ‘very close friends’ with Kashmiri Pandits</td>
<td>B:0%</td>
<td>E:14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistanis open to having Kashmiri Muslims as ‘very close friends’</td>
<td>B:30%</td>
<td>E:46.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistanis open to having Indian Sikhs as ‘very close friends’</td>
<td>B:12.5%</td>
<td>E:40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistanis open to having Pakistani Hindus as ‘very close friends’</td>
<td>B:12.5%</td>
<td>E:33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistanis open to having Pakistani Christians as ‘neighbors’</td>
<td>B:25%</td>
<td>E:44.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: B: Baseline, E: Endline

---

50. Owing to the constraints of space, the full report of the social distance survey has not been printed here. Only key highlights have been shared. The full study can be accessed from the WISCOMP office.

51. The majority of Pakistani respondents (95%) were Muslims; the remaining 5% were Christians.

52. Those social distance categories where positive shifts in perceptions were clearly discernible (from baseline to endline) have been listed here. Therefore, the table figures do not add up to 100%.
In addition to the quantitative data highlighted in Figures 3.2 to 3.4, it would be instructive to flag a few important issues here. First, with respect to the most intimate category, ‘close kinship by marriage’, even though the majority of respondents continued to express a desire to marry within their own community, the endline study showed a greater openness to marrying members of other religious/national

---

**Figure 3.3: Positive shifts in inter-community/inter-state perceptions:**

**A comparison of Indian responses from baseline to endline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indian respondents open to being ‘very close friends’ with Kashmiri Muslims</th>
<th>B:22.2% E:75%</th>
<th>Indians open to marrying a Pakistani Hindu</th>
<th>B:11.1% E:25%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indians open to having Kashmiri Pandits as ‘neighbors’</td>
<td>B:0% E:25%</td>
<td>Indians open to having a Pakistani Christian ‘as a neighbor’</td>
<td>B:0% E:25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians open to including Pakistani Muslims in their circle of ‘very close friends’</td>
<td>B:33% E:48%</td>
<td>Indians open to having Indian Muslims, Indian Buddhists, and Indian Christians as neighbors</td>
<td>B:0% E:12%–15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians open to having Pakistani Muslims as ‘professional colleagues’</td>
<td>B:0% E:18.5%</td>
<td>Indians open to having Indian Sikhs as ‘very close friends’</td>
<td>B:66% E:75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

53 While about 50% of the Indian respondents were Hindus, 43% represented Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism, Agnosticism, and Pantheism. Almost 7% of the Indians defined themselves as Atheists.

54 Correspondingly, those willing to interact with Kashmiri Muslims as only ‘visitors to my city’ fell from 11.1% to 0% in the endline survey.

55 In the baseline survey, 33.3% of the Indian respondents had said that they would be willing to interact with a Pakistani Hindu as ‘visitors to my city’ and 11.1% had wished to ‘exclude them from my city’. In the endline survey, none of the Indian respondents chose either of the two categories, and instead marked a closer social category of interaction—‘as an acquaintance’. As a result, those open to having a Pakistani Hindu ‘as an acquaintance’ increased from 11.1% in the baseline to 50% in the endline. Interestingly, even though a Pakistani Hindu has not attended the Conflict Transformation Workshops, a general improvement in the way that Indians saw Pakistanis led to feelings of closeness towards Pakistani Hindus as well.

56 In the baseline survey, 22.2% of the Indian respondents had chosen the social distance category, ‘as visitors to my city’ for Kashmiri Pandits. This fell to 0% in the endline survey and percentages for more intimate categories such as ‘very close friends’ and ‘as my neighbors’ increased.

57 In the baseline survey, 33.3% and 11.1% of the Indian respondents had chosen the categories, ‘visitors to my city’ and ‘exclude from my city’ respectively. These fell to 0% in the endline, and Indian respondents instead chose closer social categories such as ‘very close friends’ and ‘as my neighbor’ for Pakistani Christians.

58 The percentage of Indians willing to interact with Pakistani Muslims as only ‘visitors to my city’ fell from 22% in the baseline to 0% in the endline study.
Figure 3.4: Positive shifts in inter-community/inter-state perceptions: A comparison of Kashmiri responses from baseline to endline

| Kashmiri respondents open to ‘marrying’ a Kashmiri Pandit | Kashmiris open to ‘marrying’ an Indian Hindu | Kashmiris open to having Kashmiri Pandits as their ‘neighbors’ | Kashmiris open to ‘marrying’ a Pakistani Muslim | Kashmiris open to having Pakistani Hindus as ‘neighbors’ | Kashmiris open to working professionally with Pakistani Christians ‘in the same office’
---|---|---|---|---|---
B: 0% E: 18.6% | B: 0% E: 18.6% | B: 0% E: 30% | B: 25% E: 39% | B: 0% E: 33.3% | B: 0% E: 18%

groups. Generally, participants did feel closer to members of ‘the other’ country (India/Pakistan) and developed positive attitudes towards them. However, interestingly, they gave preference to religious identity over national identity when thinking of who they would be open to marrying. For example, a larger number of Indian Hindus preferred to marry a Pakistani Hindu than an Indian Muslim. Nevertheless, the overall decline in the percentage of respondents wishing to limit the intimate category of ‘close kinship by marriage’ to members of only their own community was heartening to note. For example, the endline study revealed an increase in the percentage of Kashmiri Muslim respondents who were open to marrying outside their community vis-à-vis Kashmiri Pandits, Indian Hindus, Indian Sikhs, Indian Buddhists, and Indian Atheists.

Second, the responses of the Indian participants to the kind of social interactions they wished to have with their own fellow citizens—the ‘insiders’ or the ‘in-group’—generated some surprises. There was much diversity within the Indian group as also some degree of stereotyping towards Indians who were not Hindu. For instance, those willing to have Indian Christians as ‘very close friends’ reduced from 77.7% to 62.5% (although the endline figure remained considerably high); those wishing to exclude Indian Buddhists from their social circle increased from 0% to 12.5%; and, those open to having Atheists as ‘very close friends’ fell from 88.8% in the baseline

---

59 Although Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Sikhs have participated in the Conflict Transformation Workshops, unfortunately, they did not respond to the social distance questionnaires. As a result, the data here is representative of the views of Kashmiri Muslim participants only.
to 50% in the endline. Indian respondents instead chose the more neutral category, ‘acquaintances’.

What does this data tell us? Perhaps one interpretation could be that while the focus of the Workshops has primarily been on improving relationships between Indians and Pakistanis (and within India, between Hindus and Muslims), WISCOMP did not lay as much emphasis on the negative perceptions that Indian respondents carried with respect to other minority communities—such as Christians, Buddhists, and Atheists. It appears that even though the dialogues helped to reduce social distance between the visible ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ (for instance, between a Hindu from Delhi and a Muslim from Kashmir or more generally between Indians and Pakistanis), they were less successful in addressing prejudices within the so-called ‘in-group’. For example, while the Indian Hindus built relationships of trust with Pakistanis and with Indian Muslims, Sikhs, and Kashmiris, in the endline survey, new ‘others’ emerged (Atheists, for instance).

An important learning from this is the need to address social distance between different communities within India (including caste-based prejudices) even as we continue to build bridges between Indians and Pakistanis. Participants come with prejudices about myriad ‘others’, and not just one ‘adversary’. Moreover, their identities are in a constant state of flux based on ‘who’ they define as ‘the other’. This too changes continually, from one social context to the other.

Third, it appears that, in the endline surveys, participants thought more deeply about the kind of relationships they wished to have with different groups of people and hence came up with responses which were more considered and realistic. Some participants mentioned that they were more discerning in their views (in the endline questionnaires)—for instance, in their choice of categories such as ‘neighbors’ or ‘professional colleagues’ as opposed to clubbing everyone as ‘very close friends’. They attributed this to the more nuanced knowledge of different communities and nationalities that they now had. A few also admitted that they tried to be ‘politically correct’ in the baseline questionnaires and hence chose the ‘very close friends’ category for all communities. Given the comfort level that they now shared with WISCOMP, they were at greater ease to talk about how they genuinely felt in the endline surveys. Therefore, they thought more analytically and redistributed their perceptions between categories such as ‘close kinship by marriage’, ‘neighbors’, ‘colleagues’, et al.

---

60 WISCOMP was alarmed by the increase in social distance between the ‘believers’ and ‘non-believers’. Even though the Workshops addressed the issue of religion as a resource for peace as also a source of conflict, they perhaps did not adequately take on board the perspectives of Atheist participants and their relationship with the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Christians who attended the dialogues.
Fourth, a brief comment on the data that emerged from the Kashmiri respondent surveys. Kashmiris from the Indian side were less hopeful about improvements in cross-community relations (in comparison to those from the Pakistani side). Long years of violence and insecurity have embittered the hearts of young women and men who have grown up in the Valley experiencing a disproportionate share of horror and trauma. This feeling was not discernible in those from Muzaffarabad and Rawalakot (even though they expressed their fair share of grievances against the Pakistan state). Participants from Muzaffarabad moved a few notches closer to the Indians by choosing, in the endline questionnaires, the option of ‘very close friends’ for (Indian) Hindus, Sikhs, and Kashmiri Pandits. In the baseline questionnaires, the more distant option of ‘acquaintance’ had been selected, and the category of ‘very close friends’ had thus far been reserved only for Pakistani and Indian Muslims. The endline surveys also revealed a greater level of awareness among Kashmiri participants from the Pakistani side of the identity and aspirations of the Ladakhis and Kashmiri Pandits.

3.2.c. The Other Within

Confirming the findings of the social distance survey, the qualitative data (gathered from evaluation reports and alumni reflection essays) acknowledged that adversarial perceptions were not limited to inter-country relations, but also influenced the way participants saw their fellow citizens. ‘The other’ was thus not just someone who resided across the border or in a conflict-ridden state, but also the follower of a different religion or a co-citizen belonging to a different caste or socioeconomic strata of society. For example, a Bangalore-based researcher, in her post-Workshop feedback, gave primacy to the experience of getting to know her fellow citizens better, some of whom represented communities that she had never made the effort to know. She in fact saw this as a big takeaway from the WISCOMP Workshop. The need to foreground intra-country dialogues was therefore an important learning.

Differences within the ‘in-group’ emanated from divergent views on religious, sectarian, and ethnic conflicts, the status of minority groups, regional disparities, and conflicts surrounding development policies. There was also considerable ‘in-group’ tension between those participants who wished to project a ‘united’ image of their country to ‘the other’ and those who pushed for a candid reading of the ground reality (including an admission of the wrongs committed by their own side). This, at times, led to conflicts within the Pakistani and Indian delegations, rather than between them.

61 For example, an Islamabad-based security analyst was criticized by some fellow Pakistanis at the 2012 Workshop for his candid views on the alleged nexus between the army and radical religious groups in the country. They felt that he should not speak negatively about his country while on Indian soil. At the end of one such exchange, he responded in exasperation: ‘If you don’t discuss these issues openly, you can’t diagnose and suggest remedies!’
The trajectories of the intra-country and inter-country interactions revealed that those who exhibited understanding and positive feelings towards ‘the other’ also demonstrated an ability to think critically and introspect on the wrongs committed by their own side. Antagonistic sentiments were tempered with critical thinking, particularly the hesitation to speak with certitude or to make generalizations.

Those participants who continued to be antagonistic towards ‘the other’ found it difficult to engage in reflection about the misdoings of their own side. It therefore appeared that an openness to understanding a conflicting version of ‘the truth’ from across the border and a capacity to reflect on the mistakes made by one’s own side were two sides of the same coin.

3.2.d. Commonalities and Differences

One question that generated some ambivalence and tension was whether the bilateral conflicts were the result of divergent worldviews and irreconcilable ways of looking at issues? Or, were the divisions a consequence of what Sigmund Freud has termed as ‘the narcissism of small differences’?

At one end of the continuum were Huntington-like theories about the ‘clash between civilizations’ accentuated by beliefs in different gods. This worldview seeks to project Pakistan as a country that belongs to West Asia—sharing similarities with other Islamic nations in this region and hence little in common with India. At the other end are studies, conducted primarily by psychiatrists and sociologists, who draw on the work of Freud, to propose that ‘those groups from which we most passionately distinguish ourselves are those with which we are most inseparably bound’. As Freud put it, ‘It is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them.’

For instance, many of the Indian and Pakistani participants who were ‘ethnically’ Punjabi referred to the commonality of language, literature, cultural heritage, and physical appearance (even though Punjab was the site of some of the most horrific violence during partition). In their case, the primary marker of difference was religion—and nationality—which in the words of the late Christopher Hitchens ‘symbolized the narcissism and made the most of the least discrepancy’.

At every Workshop, the Indian and Pakistani participants have expressed surprise at the number of issues over which there was a convergence of views. The shared history, common culture (particularly with respect to language, music, and cuisine), and similar professional aspirations and lifestyle choices have served as important connectors spawning deep friendships that have sustained despite national rivalries. This has often resulted in situations where participants have counted friends from across the
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. Understanding ‘the other’ and the ‘collective self’ were two simultaneous processes in which the similarities, the differences, the common ground, the shared history, the intertwined present, and the interdependent future meshed into one another. We discovered 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, and so on. We seemed then to be made from the same clay, only cast in different forms.

Anisha Kinra and Seema Sridhar
Peace and Security Researchers
(Indian Alumni, 2005 Workshop)

border to be more important than friends of their own nationality. Many have also pondered over the question: ‘If we are similar and we share common problems, then why are we fighting with each other?’

Stuti Bhatnagar, a former member of the WISCOMP team who was closely linked with the Conflict Transformation Workshops, expressed this sentiment in the following words:

I was surprised when I realized that the majority of my friends on Facebook were Pakistani. We have common interests, similar worldviews, and get along so well. Our common Punjabi identity emerged as more powerful than our differing religious identities.

The endline evaluation was replete with such comments and reflections. To cite another example, Haroon Khalid, a freelance journalist and anthropologist based in Islamabad (and alumnus of the 2012 Workshop) said to his Indian counterpart Chintan Girish Modi, a Mumbai-based educator, ‘We would have been such good friends if we were living in the same city. We share so much in common.’62 In response, Chintan talked about the ‘respect and affection’ he felt for Haroon since the first day they met.63

Our detachment from and indifference to 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. Understanding ‘the other’ and the ‘collective self’ were two simultaneous processes in which the similarities, the differences, the common ground, the shared history, the intertwined present, and the interdependent future meshed into one another. We discovered 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, and so on. We seemed then to be made from the same clay, only cast in different forms.

Anisha Kinra and Seema Sridhar
Peace and Security Researchers
(Indian Alumni, 2005 Workshop)

62 It would, however, be incorrect to suggest that all the Indian and Pakistani participants left the Workshops as the best of friends. Differences did arise between some of them, and this often had to do with their hesitation to open up to narratives they disagreed with and to genuinely listen to ‘the other’. As a female researcher from Islamabad put it, ‘I made some great friends, [but] there were also those with whom I had huge arguments. I suppose it comes down to whether there is a willingness to empathize and to try to really understand “the other”. If not, then it creates all sorts of acrimony.’ Source: Quote taken from the endline survey of a Pakistani participant who attended the 2012 Workshop.

Cultural affinity, the shared love for cricket, Bollywood films, Pakistani textiles, and *mughlai* cuisine served as wonderful ice breakers and helped to build good friendships. But, would these be able to facilitate deep-rooted change to transform the complex and seemingly intractable conflicts between the two countries? WISCOMP often reminded participants that while the cultural similarities could serve as a good entry point for building understanding, a far deeper level of analytical and strategic relationship-building would be required to establish profound reconciliation.

During the Workshop dialogues, there were times when some Indian participants subsumed the differences (particularly those of identity), and Pakistani participants wondered if the Indians were questioning the raison d’être for the creation of Pakistan (and hence the ‘two-nation theory’). The Indian tendency to romanticize Hindu-Muslim coexistence in British India and to speak nostalgically about the days when ‘we were one’ would, often, tread the dangerous path of criticizing and inevitably questioning the 1947 partition. This would understandably generate discomfort among the Pakistani participants because they would interpret it to mean that the Indians were repeating the mistakes of earlier generations by questioning the very basis of, and rationale for, the existence of Pakistan.

For example, a participant from Ladakh (who had not met a Pakistani prior to the WISCOMP Workshop) echoed the views of many Indians when he said, ‘Talking to a Pakistani is like talking to a citizen of my country. Similarities in culture, tradition, dress, language, and ethics have left no place for oddity.’ Such statements received mixed responses from the Pakistani participants because these would tend to dilute the differences and diversity that existed between and within the two countries. Building on the commonalities yet acknowledging the differences was indeed difficult for a good number of the participants.
There is a fine yet important line between celebrating the cultural bonhomie between the people of the two countries and simultaneously respecting the differences that lie between them. Although many of the differences have been amplified over years of hostility and the absence of contact, there are also some very real divergences in outlook and worldview, which need to be acknowledged and respected. Further, with respect to cultural similarities, while the two nations do have much in common, they have also established and preserved traditions and beliefs, which are different. These nuanced differences are, however, not appreciated often enough.

In this context, Jyotirmoy Chaudhuri, a Delhi-based security analyst whose father was a surgeon in the Indian army in Jammu and Kashmir at the height of the conflict in the 1990s, talks about how the Conflict Transformation Workshop made him ‘peel off layers of romantic illusions’ of Pakistan as ‘part of a greater, beautiful India where all castes and creeds lived happily ever-after’:

*The Workshop consciously pegged Pakistan as a vibrant, developing country in its own right, albeit with similar problems and misconceptions of its 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 Baig, a lawyer from Lahore, whose meeting with Jyoti at the Inaugural Workshop in 2001 led to the blossoming of a close friendship, adds:

*Unlike Jyoti’s initial romantic notion of Pakistan, I had always been made to see India as the neighboring country that was ‘never’ going to be a friend. Like Jyoti, I too realized, at the WISCOMP Workshop, that ‘the other side’ was a vibrant, developing country in its own right.*

In this context, the Workshops invited participants to engage with the ‘similarities’ and ‘differences’ with a purpose to more deeply understand ‘the other’ and see the world through his/her eyes. Participants were encouraged to think about ‘active coexistence’ rather than struggling with ways to erase differences. They were asked to reflect on questions such as: How might they build common ground and coexist without doing away with the differences between their respective identities? While proudly reclaiming their vibrant and shared history of pluralism, how might they draw on this rich heritage and use it as a resource for friendship and cooperation in the future?

---

64 Muna Baig and Jyotirmoy Chaudhuri, ‘It Has To Be Us’, *Closer to Ourselves* (New Delhi: WISCOMP, 2008), p. 27.
### What did you learn about ‘the other’ that you didn’t know before the Conflict Transformation Workshop?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learnt that Pakistan is as diverse a country as India. Just like us, people there too have their own dreams, aspirations, and opinions; and these vary. Peace between the two countries is possible.</td>
<td><em>Former Indian army officer (currently based in Afghanistan)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learnt that (in the past) many myths, half-truths, and prejudices have passed off as facts and reality.</td>
<td><em>Print Journalist, Islamabad</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I realized that many people in India are eager to interact with Pakistanis (and Kashmiris on this side) and to work with us to resolve the conflicts.</td>
<td><em>PhD Scholar from Rawalakot</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to learn about the views of Indians and Kashmiris on current regional, political, religious, and social processes... After meeting Indian youth, I redefined my concepts and narratives, which were largely based upon secondary sources.</td>
<td><em>Peace journalist from Muzaffarabad</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I realized that we young Pakistanis and Indians have the same set of ambitions...Pre-existing affinities are hard to ignore. These have led to some strong friendships.</td>
<td><em>Islamabad-based researcher</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learnt that my country, India, too, is overwhelmed by the same set of problems faced by Pakistan. Therefore, in order to move ahead, both sides need to change their perceptions of each other through increased people-to-people dialogue and work together for social change.</td>
<td><em>Psychologist, Bangalore</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most important thing that I have learnt is that we should never discontinue communication at any cost. This is critical to generating understanding and reducing prejudice.</td>
<td><em>Security analyst, Islamabad</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I felt closer to the people of other faiths and nations. My own views about communal harmony and peaceful coexistence were strengthened.

*Spiritual practitioner based in Karachi*

Sending ‘leap in the dark’ peace signals to ‘the other’ does not mean that we are acting from a place of weakness. The Workshop conversations were cathartic and showed us that relationships based on trust include engagement at the levels of the intellect and the heart.

*Dancer and Heritage Education Practitioner, New Delhi*

Through the Workshops, I got first-hand information about the Indians. With this awareness of who they really are, I can now see through the deceptive and limited media coverage of both countries.

*College teacher, Lahore*

I learnt that, being human beings, we all have the same fears and grievances. I realized that it’s not trying to agree or disagree with ‘the other’ that matters, but rather understanding ‘the other’ that matters. Listening and hearing may be skills that we adopt naturally; but understanding, as a tool and skill, is something that can only be acquired, with consistent effort and practice. And the Conflict Transformation Workshops set us on this path.

*Journalist from Islamabad*

### 3.2.e. Collaborative Explorations: Cross-Border Professional Partnerships

Although the Indian and Pakistani participants built strong bonds of friendship, for WISCOMP, the critical question was with respect to the processes that these relationships were able to generate. There was sufficient evidence to suggest that because of these relationships, participants were not only able to sustain their cross-border dialogues (particularly during crises such as the Mumbai attacks in 2008), but through their respective vocations, they publicly questioned their political leaders and the media when the latter sought to escalate the hostility. In this context, the endline evaluation investigated deeper into how these relationships had generated broader processes of change.

To begin with, it was observed that participants who built trusting relationships at the Workshops were able to collaborate with one another to initiate dialogue (across the lines of conflict), share information, engage in advocacy and community services,
coordinate regional projects, and support professional advancement efforts in conflict transformation. In other words, personal relationships created a context for professional collaborations and strategic coordination of peacebuilding work among the alumni, which in turn generated social capital for coexistence. While the cultural affinity and shared interests and lifestyles played a big part in changing the way the Indian and Pakistani participants interacted with one another, what acted as even stronger glue were the common professional aspirations and visions for the future—a future that they saw as connected.

These served as a basis for the alumni to work together on several post-Workshop initiatives. For example, many entered into partnerships to co-facilitate and jointly organize cross-border dialogues and trainings modeled on the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshops. Others undertook collaborative action research and book writing projects, some of which WISCOMP supported financially. For instance, in 2005, WISCOMP instituted the Collaborative Research Award in an effort to deepen professional partnerships between ‘third generation’ Indians and Pakistanis. The Research Award provided a context for young people in the two countries to dialogue on a sustained basis and to link their academic research with the experience of working collaboratively. Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Assistant Professor, Center for International Peace and Stability, National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad, and Michelle Baxter, Assistant Manager, Volunteer Action, CRY (Child Rights and You), Chennai, were the first joint recipients of this Award. Together, they embarked on a two-year study titled *The Attitudes of Teachers in India and Pakistan: Texts and Contexts* (New Delhi: WISCOMP, 2007). Other cross-border partnerships which have their roots in the Conflict Transformation Workshops include comparative studies on religious extremism in India and Pakistan, alternative narratives of the 1947 partition, the role of educational institutions in facilitating conflict transformation, joint analyses of issues emerging out of the conflicts over water-sharing, and proposals for peacebuilding in Jammu and Kashmir. Workshop alumni have also come together to contribute to other civil society initiatives between the two countries. For instance, a good number of the alumni participated in the India-Pakistan Peace March from Delhi to Multan in 2005, seeking to further strengthen and expand the constituencies for peace in the two countries.

In 2007, WISCOMP initiated a ‘collaborative storytelling project’ to investigate the empirical basis of the Workshop’s theories of change. By now, it was clear to

---

65 Zahid and Michelle conducted a joint research of the ways in which school teachers in India and Pakistan indoctrinate the young with ‘enemy images’ of ‘the other’, and how this in turn affects processes of nation-building. They also highlighted the positive changes that have come about in recent years with respect to teacher training and curriculum development in both countries.
WISCOMP that the Workshops had created ‘a new point of reference’ for Indians and Pakistanis ‘to tell positive stories about each other’. These stories, often coauthored by an Indian and a Pakistani alumna, were collated in the book *Closer to Ourselves: Stories from the Journey towards Peace in South Asia*. Highlighting experiences of relationship-building that took place as a result of the encounters at the Conflict Transformation Workshops, this book documented stories of personal and relational change—some tangible, others less so—hinting also at the possibility of wider social transformation that such cross-border dialogues-cum-trainings could initiate. Woven into these stories were the alumni’s visions, action-plans, and forecasts for peace in the region, as also the kernels for an empirical study on the tangible change that the Workshop dialogues generated.

Responding to the alumni’s request for a journal that focused on the field of peacebuilding and its engagement with South Asian issues, in 2008, WISCOMP started publication of a bi-annual journal titled *Peace Prints*. Providing a context for the alumni to co-author papers with senior Workshop resource persons, the journal served as a platform for dialogue between different generations of scholar-practitioners, generating a cross-fertilization of ideas on issues of sustainable peace and security in the region. Over the years, it has emerged as an important resource for those using a peacebuilding lens through which to address South Asian conflicts. WISCOMP has also published an alumni directory titled *Peace Network* which highlights the diverse ways in which youth leaders from different professional backgrounds are contributing to peacebuilding efforts in the region. This directory has not only helped to widen the reach of the 400-strong alumni network, it has also served as a resource for building partnerships amongst ‘next generation’ South Asian practitioners, beyond the context of the Workshops.

Between 2001 and 2012, the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation dialogues have generated a repertoire of books, working papers, reports, and films that have made an important contribution to the discourse on peacebuilding in South Asia and, in particular, to the possibilities for conflict transformation between India and Pakistan.

---


67 The journal can be accessed through the WISCOMP website at the following link: http://www.wiscomp.org/pp-v4-n2/peaceprints6.html. Print copies are also available for purchase from the WISCOMP office.

68 See Annexure 3 for a full listing of these resources that have emerged out of the Conflict Transformation Workshops.
In conclusion, the following positive shifts (among the Indian and Pakistani alumni) were recorded in the endline study with respect to the dimension of relational change:

- An overwhelmingly positive view of those who were previously seen as adversaries.
- A conscious attempt to steer clear of generalizations and certitudes when speaking about ‘other’ communities and nationalities.
- A sensitivity to the need to listen (without judgment) to the experiences and concerns of ‘the other side’ and a corresponding capacity to express one’s own views accurately, without restriction or fear.
- The initiation of several cross-border professional partnerships, which brought within the alumni’s circle of influence a wider group of individuals not directly associated with the WISCOMP Workshops.

### 3.3. Structural Change

*Were these efforts at dialogue, attitudinal change, and relationship-building enough to counter terrorism, the Kashmir issue, and the age-old Muslim-Hindu rift? Not entirely, to be honest. Yet, it is perhaps we—the third generation—who can bring that change eventually. It has to be us. I am very hopeful of it.*

*Muna Baig, Human Rights Lawyer, Lahore (Alumnus, 2001 & 2009 Workshops)*

Can cross-border relationships (of the kind built at the WISCOMP workshops) influence Track One thinking and lead to progressive actions by governments? Can personal change influence broader social patterns through which conflict is enacted? Workshop participant Muna Baig’s question represents, perhaps, one of the most daunting challenges that conflict transformation efforts confront. The WISCOMP Workshops were no exception.

Taking on board this challenge, WISCOMP continually explored how personal and relational change could be more closely linked with structural and cultural change. Although several Workshop sessions included the participation of policymakers, politicians, and military officers to more squarely address this challenge, we believed that investment in a new generation of leaders whose motivation and actions would be qualitatively different from those of their predecessors was an important prerequisite for structural change. Implicit here was a recognition of the need for new models of leadership. Drawing on an articulation by Ambassador Ragnar Angeby, Senior Advisor (Conflict Prevention) at the Folke Bernadotte Academy, Sweden, WISCOMP felt
that Indian and Pakistani youth leaders should build the capacity ‘to identify and influence feelings, patterns and values, and learn with the surrounding environment rather than attempting to steer it’. Leadership should not necessarily be linked to those in power but related to those having the capacity to create change.\textsuperscript{69} Informed by this model, the Conflict Transformation Workshops brought to a common space those young individuals who had already demonstrated transformational leadership qualities and were strategically located in their communities, organizations, and even government departments to influence decision-making and broader change processes. The hope was that when such participants build strategic relationships, it becomes easier to connect personal and relational transformation with the broader levels of structural and cultural change.

3.3.a. Impact on Media Reportage and Policy Formulations

Although the linkages between personal, relational, structural, and cultural change can be tested only after some years of observing the alumni’s career trajectories and the nature of decisions they take in their respective institutions, it is heartening that some examples have already come to light within a short span of time. For example, an Indian alumnus, working at the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi, shared this feedback with WISCOMP:

\begin{displayquote}
The Workshops made me realize the need to bring out-of-box thinking to governmental decision-making and promote cooperative tendencies among colleagues.
\end{displayquote}

Many journalists who had participated in the Conflict Transformation Workshops sent WISCOMP examples of how they had tried to change the way their newspaper/television channel covered bilateral relations—which, in some cases, also influenced the track one-level dialogue. We share here one such story by Kamran Rehmat, Editor, Pique Magazine, Islamabad (and Alumnus, 2005 Workshop). Belonging to a family that lost members to the 1947 carnage, Kamran was no stranger to the trauma that partition violence unleashed on generations of Indians and Pakistanis. Yet, in the summer of 2005, he chose to break the cycle of vengeance and hostility by using his power as a journalist to campaign for the release of Pakistani and Indian PoWs (Prisoners of War), languishing in ‘the other’ country’s jails, in some cases, for decades.
Although the newspaper (a leading national daily) with which he was associated at the time wanted to focus only on the Pakistani prisoners in Indian jails, Kamran argued with his editor,

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 soldiers. When the lopsided campaign failed to take off, I reminded my editor that it would make sense to highlight the predicament of Indian prisoners...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 centerstage. Finally, my editor 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 600 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...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...It does not take genius to make the right call on finding 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 neighbor too.\(^{70}\)

WISCOMP received similar stories from participants who represented the fields of communication and journalism, and who exhibited the courage to use their position within the news channel or newspaper to effect broader change. Like Kamran, they used a two-fold approach where the attempt, through the media campaign, was to make the issue ‘topical’ for the governments and to mobilize a ‘critical mass’ of strategically located Indian and Pakistani citizens to support the campaign. In recent years, some alumni have participated in media campaigns that have used the internet to call for the release of innocent fishermen languishing in ‘the other’ country’s jails.

Since the campaigns are launched online, they transcend physical borders and boundaries and are able to garner public support across myriad fault-lines.

Gulalai Khan, a Lahore-based communications’ practitioner, currently associated with the Lahore University of Management Sciences, shared the following reflections on how the WISCOMP Workshops impacted her as well as the television programs she produced and directed:

When I attended the Conflict Transformation Workshops in 2004 and 2006, I was a producer and director with GEO TV, in-charge of infotainment shows. After participating in the Workshops, I consciously started checking the programs for any anti-India content. I became particular about ensuring that such negative content was not aired. As a producer and director, I had the power to edit it out.

3.3.b. Impact on Educational Institutions

The creation of teaching resources and curriculum to advance ‘education for peace’ in schools and colleges in India and Pakistan, represents another important dimension of structural change. Through the Conflict Transformation Workshops, WISCOMP has emerged as a foremost developer of curriculum for trainings in peacebuilding. It has been invited by colleges and universities in India and Pakistan to help formulate the curriculum for degree programs in peace and conflict studies. Some of these institutions include Lady Shri Ram College (New Delhi), Jamia Millia Islamia (New Delhi), Tibetan Center for Conflict Resolution (Dharamsala), Quaid-i-Azam University (Islamabad), Kinnaird College for Women (Lahore), and the National University of Sciences and Technology (Islamabad), among others.

The Workshops’ impact on school teachers has also been significant. Chintan Girish Modi, a school teacher from Mumbai (and alumnus of the 2012 Workshop titled The Software of Peacebuilding) echoed the views of his Workshop peers from the field of education, when he stated:

Our duty as teachers is to encourage such dialogue as we experienced at the WISCOMP Workshop. This might go a long way in building bridges. Most of our students may never visit Pakistan or meet a Pakistani. What they know and how they think will be largely based on what they pick up from school, hear or read in the media, and what they are told at home. What we can do, however, is to provide alternative perspectives, or at least

---

71 During the screening process, WISCOMP took the strategic decision that at least 25% of the Workshop participants should represent educational institutions (from K-12 to the university level).
build the skills to question and interpret images and information thrown at them. It is important to find a balance between the two extremes of ‘they-are-all-terrorists’ and ‘we-are-all-brothers-and-sisters’. The real stuff is somewhere in between. Not at the border but in that space where we find the courage to shed the skins we wear too comfortably.

Like Chintan, several participants (from the field of education) shared with WISCOMP the deep impact of the Workshops on their own attitudes and worldviews. These shifts in consciousness motivated a good number of them to seek WISCOMP’s help in curriculum development to introduce courses in conflict transformation/peacebuilding in their respective institutions. In addition, they drew on readings and study materials from WISCOMP as well as the Workshops’ elicitive approach to transact the course in their respective classrooms. Over the years, WISCOMP has donated publications that emerged out of the Conflict Transformation Workshops to the university libraries and centers where the alumni are located and where they are seeking to build a resource base for education in peacebuilding.

Some alumni referred to the resistance they faced from the college management when, for instance, they introduced more positive readings in the syllabus about ‘the other’ country. However, what was heartening for them was the encouraging feedback they received from the students who expressed a desire to learn more about ‘the other’ and to think more deeply about the enemy images they had absorbed from their families, educational institutions, and the media.

For example, Salma Malik, Assistant Professor in the Department of Defense and Strategic Studies at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, shared with WISCOMP:

I was very happy to receive positive feedback from my students when I included components of conflict transformation from the Workshop curriculum in my readings’ package.

Gradually, she made conflict transformation an important area of study and discussion in a graduate studies department that hitherto looked at peace and security issues through a Realist lens. Gulalai Khan, a media practitioner associated with UNDP, who also serves as a member of the visiting faculty at a Lahore-based college, shared a similar story:

I teach a media course at the post-graduate level. WISCOMP influenced the content of what I taught in this course. After being exposed to ‘peace journalism’ at the Conflict Transformation Workshops, I decided to introduce a module on this as well as a section on Indo-Pak relations in the course.
The module on peace journalism was, in fact, quite popular among the Workshop participants. WISCOMP received information from at least five Pakistani alumni who taught in the Mass Communication Masters’ Programs at various colleges and universities (in Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi) that they had adapted this Workshop module to offer a course on peace journalism (and more broadly on the relationship between the media and conflict resolution) to the aspiring journalists in their classes.

Since the alumni represented diverse disciplines, different elements of the Workshop curriculum appealed to them. For instance, a participant from a post-graduate university in Delhi found the conflict transformation critique of international relations and the latter’s inability to deal with intra-state conflicts to be relevant, and hence decided to offer a paper on peacebuilding in the IR Master’s program. School educators made reference to the Workshop methodology—based on the ‘elicitive approach’ to learning—which they found helpful. It sensitized them to the need ‘to also listen and learn from the students’ and to use a more dialogic approach to addressing conflict and difference in the classroom.

WISCOMP came across many such examples of the different ways in which the alumni used the Workshop curriculum to change both the content and pedagogy of teaching at their respective educational institutions. From these stories also emerged indicators of the relationship between personal change and the participants’ motivation, capacity, and power to impact the institutions where they worked. The ramifications of this can be far-reaching because educators, whether at the school or university levels, have immense power to shape and influence young minds, particularly on issues of conflict, prejudice, peace, and coexistence.

However, more extensive empirical research is needed before we can conclusively point to the linkages between the personal, relational, and structural levels of change. An intervention that could facilitate greater integration of these different dimensions is with respect to a broadening of the focus on relationship-building to include (in addition to individuals) institutions wherein the selection of participants is determined by the organizations they represent (schools, colleges, media companies, NGOs, government departments, the security sector, et al)—thereby addressing the goal of cross-border institutional partnerships. Through such partnerships, a Pakistani educator could spend a semester at a college in India teaching subjects such as conflict resolution and sociology and vice versa. The Aman ki Asha initiative, a collaborative endeavor between the Times of India in New Delhi and the Jang Group of Newspapers in Karachi is one such example, which has succeeded to a considerable degree in influencing broader change processes. For instance, its media campaign Milne Do, which called for a liberalization of the visa policy that the two countries followed...
towards each other played a big part in building pressure on the two governments to sign, in September 2012, a new visa agreement which removed some of the barriers to cross-border travel for ordinary Indians and Pakistanis. It however remains to be seen if this agreement will hold in the years to come.

3.4. Cultural Change

John Paul Lederach, in his elucidation of the cultural dimension of social change, talks about how social norms and traditions influence the way people communicate, express feelings, and engage or avoid open conflict. They also determine the significance of meaning structures, such as those relating to religious belief or place and land. Views on authority, age, and gender (as they relate to decision-making and representation) as well as those on justice, healing, and reconciliation are also determined by cultural norms.

Although processes that seek to bring about cultural change require longer-term timeframes and deeper engagement, WISCOMP conducted a preliminary investigation into whether any shifts in this respect could be discerned as a result of the Conflict Transformation Workshops. Interestingly, some Indian and Pakistani participants referred to the Workshops’ emphasis on active listening as an important ‘cultural learning’, articulating a need to build cultures where this practice received greater value. Couched within this broader insight were many significant shifts in perceptions. For example, many participants—Indians and Pakistanis—talked about how it was common in their culture to judge a person/community with whom they were in conflict; or, the act of taking the first step to initiate a dialogue with the ‘enemy’ was often seen as a sign of weakness (in their family/community). The Workshops, however, pushed participants to question these assumptions, and in fact proposed their flipside. There was thus the realization among many that being the first to take a step towards conciliation was not a sign of weakness, rather an act that required inner strength and courage. A college teacher from Peshawar in fact expressed the need to change cultures across the region because, as she put it, ‘South Asians, generally, exhibit less patience for such practices [listening and dialogue] in everyday conversations even though these are enshrined in our faith traditions.’

With a view to influence cultural change processes, WISCOMP built into the Workshop curriculum a series of heritage walks to sites that embodied a shared history. The inclusion of these walks was done with the purpose to help participants look beyond the idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’ and explore, instead, those symbols within their faith traditions that could promote inter-cultural understanding, coexistence, nonviolence, and empathy. The heritage walks emerged as a powerful pedagogical
tool to help participants see their own cultures through a lens that highlighted a history of coexistence. This was seen as an important learning because if young Sought Asians could see their diverse cultures as connectors (rather than dividers), then the possibilities for inter-state and inter-religious understanding would increase manifold.

An equally significant area of discussion was with respect to cultural norms on gender relations. Participants recognized that one common theme which found resonance in the diverse sub-cultures they represented was the existence of beliefs and attitudes that condoned violence against women. In addition to the overt forms of violence against women, some female participants talked about discrimination within the home. Particularly troubling was the invisible nature of this discrimination since it had cultural sanction. The transformation of values concerning the status of women in Indian and Pakistani societies was seen as one of the biggest challenges with respect to the cultural dimension of change. Indian and Pakistani women, in fact, spoke in unison on this subject, sharing similar experiences of threat, insecurity, rejection, and violence, based on their gender identity. They were, in fact, able to build coalitions around this issue, transcending the boundaries of nationality and religion.

In this context, the challenges presented by the discourse of cultural relativism—which tends to view all cultural practices as equally valid even if some are rooted in inequality—were highlighted. Participants pointed to the violence carried out against women in the name of honor and shame, which often has community sanction since it is considered to be ‘part of the culture of the people’. The act of changing ‘cultural values’ that devalue women (and the roles they perform) was seen as a daunting
challenge in the context of the dominant societal norms in India and Pakistan. For example, a grassroots peacebuilder from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan referred to the culturally-embedded concepts of honor and dishonor where women are seen as ‘bearers of culture’ and ‘upholders of family honor’. He talked about his efforts to change the way honor is understood in his community because such a transformation is vital if honor killings are to be stopped. The generation of respect for the independent choices and aspirations of individual women (and men), was seen as a significant cultural challenge in the context within which he lived.

Participants thus talked about the need to change inequitable cultural values and promote universal standards of equality and justice. However, even as they did this, some also pointed to the existence of indigenous beliefs that promoted gender equity and respected human diversity. The need therefore was to highlight these positive examples of the ways in which culture could be used as a resource to promote equality and happiness for all, even while recognizing that everything that is ‘indigenous’ and ‘rooted in local culture’ is not necessarily helpful in advancing gender (or even caste/class) equity.
Chapter 4

Ms. Pamela Philipose (Editor-in-Chief, Women’s Feature Service, New Delhi), Ms. Suhasini Haidar (Deputy Foreign Editor and Prime-Time Anchor, CNN-IBN, New Delhi), Mr. F.S. Ajajuddin (Art-Historian and Principal of Aitchison College, Lahore), and Dr. Vidya Shankar Aiyar (Media Professional and Strategic Analyst, New Delhi) at a panel discussion on The Role of the Media in Conflict Generation and Conflict Transformation in India and Pakistan at the Tenth Annual Workshop held in 2012.

Ms. Gazala Paul (Peace Educator and Trustee with the grassroots organization Samerth, Ahmedabad), Mr. Ahmad Shikib Dost (Journalist and News Presenter with Afghanistan National Radio and Television, Kabul), and Ms. Kamla Bhasin (Gender Trainer and Cofounder, SANGAT, New Delhi) at a Roundtable on Best Practices in Peacebuilding in South Asia. The Roundtable was held as part of the Eighth Annual Workshop in 2010.

Workshop resource persons Mr. Saumya Sen (Advertising Professional and Founder, Leapfrog, New Delhi), Ms. Beena Sarwar (Journalist and Pakistan Editor of the Aman Ki Asha initiative, Karachi), and Mr. Dilip D’Souza (Journalist and Member, Managing Committee, Citizens for Peace, Mumbai) at a Roundtable on Multi-Track Peacebuilding, held as part of the Annual Workshop in 2004 titled Dialogic Engagement.

Workshop resource persons Dr. Mohini Giri (Chairperson, Guild of Service, New Delhi, and former Chairperson, National Commission for Women, Government of India), Dr. Swarna Rajagopalan (Political Analyst, Social Entrepreneur, and Founder, Pranjna Trust, Chennai), and Ms. Ashima Kaul (a Peace Practitioner working in Kashmir and a former Consultant with WISCOMP) at a Workshop Roundtable on Women and Peacebuilding.
Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding for a New Generation
Chapter 4
Select Dialogue Themes

The Conflict Transformation Workshops have brought to a common space a wide range of cross-cutting themes that have informed the dialogues between young Indians and Pakistanis. While some dialogues captured the power of peacebuilding and the intense experiences through which long-held prejudices were transformed, others brought to the fore the fragility of peace and the humbling recognition that conflict transformation requires critical reflection, commitment, and the patience to work for long-term change even as we continue to live in contexts of violence. In addition, the Workshops have engaged with the structural dimensions of peacebuilding, focusing on the complex relationship between governance, democracy, human security, and the delivery of justice.

The structure, content, and accomplishments of the bilateral peace process through the vehicle of the government-level composite dialogue formed the fulcrum of several Workshop sessions. The attempt, at these sessions, was to reframe the ‘divisive’ issues, explore areas of cooperation that could serve as ‘connectors’, and foreground those subjects which while not part of the government-level dialogue could build trust and coexistence. For example, in addition to the issues listed in the composite dialogue agenda—Jammu and Kashmir, terrorism and drug trafficking, peace and security including confidence building measures (CBMs), Siachen, Tulbul Navigation Project/Wullar Barrage, Sir Creek, economic and commercial cooperation, and the promotion of people-to-people contacts (which include efforts to liberalize the visa regime and encourage friendly exchanges in various fields)—the Workshops addressed subjects such as education, healthcare, peace journalism, and natural resource-sharing which could serve as ‘connectors’ and enhance cooperation between the two countries.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to list all the issues that were addressed over the last 10 years, this chapter presents a summary of the dialogues on six subjects, which found a resonance at all the Workshops. These are: Gender, Conflict, and Peace; Jammu and Kashmir: Building Common Ground; ‘The Past That Lies Before Us’: Partition Narratives; Media and the Peace Process; Religion: A Resource for Peace?; and Scaling Up: In Search of a South Asian Sensibility. A select list of additional themes that were discussed at the Workshops is provided at the conclusion of this Chapter.
4.1. Gender, Conflict, and Peace

The Conflict Transformation Workshops advanced the view that while a gender perspective is integral to peacebuilding efforts, there is a need to focus on the transformation of gender relations at all levels of society—within the home, in the workplace, in the community, at the negotiation table, and at the level of wider social and political processes. Even though there remains a fairly strict policing of the boundaries between the private and the public in both India and Pakistan, WISCOMP encouraged participants to look at the ways in which gender inequities perpetuated in the home are linked to those carried out in the community and the public writ large. In fact, often, it was observed at the Workshops that while a dialogue on gender began with the recognition of increasing the number of women participating in peace processes or including their perspectives, it concluded with the realization that peace begins within the home.

The discussions on gender, however, were not positioned as one where women and men are pitched against one another for greater power. Rather, WISCOMP encouraged...
participants to see the issue as a continuum of ideologies: at one end, there is patriarchy and at the other, there is the view which foregrounds respect and equity in relations between men and women. In fact, the Workshops actively invited the participation of men and their support as partners in efforts to advance women’s rights. The attempt was to collectively engage with a gender perspective on issues of ‘positive peace’ and ‘human security’, going well beyond the mere absence of visible violence to include all forms of cultural and structural violence. In this context, the Workshop module on *Gender, Conflict, and Peace* addressed a range of questions, some of which are listed here: How does violent conflict affect the lives and livelihoods of men and women? How do they respond to violence? What do women do differently from men in such times of turbulence? How do they define their needs and aspirations? How do conventional notions of masculinity and femininity impact gender roles and gender identities, particularly in the context of armed conflicts? In what ways can men partner with women in the quest for gender equity?

In the context of India-Pakistan relations, each Workshop highlighted the significant role that women’s groups have played. Women’s peace activism, in fact, dates back to the 1980s when there were few takers for the idea of promoting goodwill and coexistence between the two countries. Over these three decades, women’s groups have emphasized the importance of dialogue—keeping the channels of communication open even when governments suspended diplomatic ties and the media succumbed to jingoistic reporting. For example, following the Kargil conflict in 1999, Indian and Pakistani women (including parliamentarians) came together to take a joint position on the need for dialogue to continue. Similarly, in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks (2008), women parliamentarians in Pakistan were the first to come together and issue a Resolution condemning the attacks and expressing solidarity with the victims’ families. They emphasized the need for a dispassionate engagement with the root causes of terror and called for collaborative strategies to respond to the ‘spoilers’ and build long-term security.

However, even as the Conflict Transformation Workshops engaged with the diverse roles that women have played in waging peace and crossing ‘enemy-lines’ to build trust, they also provided a space to critically examine the notion of a ‘sisterhood’ that cuts across ethnic and religious fault-lines and to listen deeply to the gender-sensitive voices of both men and women on issues such as militarism, governance, human rights, and development. Assumptions that link women to peace and men to war were problematized with a view to bring in a diversity of experiences and perspectives. Some key insights from the Workshop sessions on *Gender, Conflict, and Peace* are shared here:
In the endline study, a good number of women from India and Pakistan saw gender as a ‘safe entry point’ to initiate conversations with ‘the other’ and to build the foundation for discussing more complex issues such as Kashmir. For instance, Nadia Anjum, Assistant Professor (English) at Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, said that the first ‘connector’ which helped her to feel comfortable with the Indian participants was the theme, ‘women as individuals committed to the cause of conflict resolution.’ As she put it, ‘I saw a tiny ray of hope, an intangible presence of a collective consciousness. And I held onto it.’

Even though the Workshops engaged with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent Resolutions (1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960) which sought to end the impunity that perpetrators of sexual violence possessed, the dialogues emphasized women’s peace agency and the different perspectives they brought to conflict transformation efforts. While doing this, an attempt was made to transcend the focus on including a ‘critical mass’ of women, which while significant should not be seen as an end in itself. The Workshops tried to take the dialogue beyond the mere inclusion of women in peace processes to focus on the qualitative shift in understanding/thinking that their perspectives brought.

While there was consensus among the participants on the subject of gender equality, Workshop conversations around the idea of ‘difference’ between women’s perspectives were more complex. In South Asia, gender crosses the social divisions of language, religion, nationality, and geography. Many women’s groups have in fact come together to take constructive action for peace on the basis of the reality that violent conflict affects women and girls in very specific and common ways. Yet, the cultural markers of caste, class, religion, and ethnicity have also divided women’s experiences. For example, in India, the experiences of a dalit woman are different from those of an upper caste Hindu woman. The experiences of women belonging to minority communities, particularly in the context of social/political violence, are different from those of women belonging to the majority community. This question was addressed at the Conflict Transformation Workshops, particularly those held in 2003 and 2004 in the aftermath of the Gujarat pogrom (2002) which targeted Muslim women and their bodies with a kind of brutality not witnessed before. The question came up again at the 2009 Workshop—this time in the context of Jammu and Kashmir. The intersection of gender identity with the fault-lines of armed conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has problematized many assumptions about ‘women and peacebuilding’. The 2009 Workshop, which

---

was held a few months after the Amarnath land crisis of 2008\textsuperscript{73} brought into stark focus the regional divides between Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh, and the almost militant mobilization of women along the fault-lines of religion and ethnicity. In this context, Sumona DasGupta, a political scientist (and former Assistant Director of WISCOMP), made the following comment at the 2012 Conflict Transformation Workshop:

\textit{What could have been a secular discourse on sub-regional identities became a high-pitched communal drama marked by Hindutva slogans in Jammu and Islamist slogans in the Valley, almost mirroring each other in their intensity and articulation. Ironically, there were huge gatherings of protesting women from both communities. This violent militant mobilization of women has raised some fundamental questions. Whether a new wave of feminist politics marked by a feminist consciousness can actually emerge in this state of affairs is the moot question. Can it transcend identity borderlines that have remained so firmly entrenched in the minds of the people? Because what we have actually seen in practice is that women’s gender identities have been subsumed by other identities of religion, class, and/or region. While gender identity can never be seen in isolation as it always has to be located at the intersection of various other identities; yet in the context of Jammu and Kashmir; it is hostage to the politics of competing nationalisms and the politics of competing sub-regionalisms. The mere presence of women in dharnas and rallies that we see in Jammu or in the Valley is not really a sign of genuine emancipation.}

Although the wider context of women’s interventions in the India-Pakistan peace process represents a successful case study of how women have transcended national (and religious) identities to build trust and engage in problem-solving, efforts to initiate a similar coming together of women within the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir have been less successful. While the latter created a space for some degree of personal transformation, in a moment of crisis (for instance, a stone-pelting incident that led to clashes between Kashmiri youth and the security forces, and the tragic loss of lives), women were unable to arrive at a consensus on their aspirations and action plans. This is the dilemma of building peace in an area of conflict, and whether a feminist consciousness emerges from this context remains to be seen.

\textsuperscript{73} In 2008, Kashmiris took to the streets to protest against the transfer of land to the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board. As a result, the government decided to revoke this transfer, which in turn resulted in a frenzied reaction in the Hindu-dominated Dogra belt of Jammu. The agitation acquired communal tones with Hindus in Jammu and Muslims in Srinagar coming out to protest against each other. A striking feature of these protests was the large-scale participation of women on both sides.
• Even though the women’s movements in South Asia have interrogated conventional structures of security and democracy and offered feminist perspectives which have included the voices of other historically marginalized groups (based on markers such as caste, religion, and ethnicity), often, participants came to the Workshops with experiences which reinforced the stark reality that violence against women in different spheres—whether in the home, on the street, in the community, or in the professional sphere—remains rampant as also does their exclusion from levels where decisions are taken.

Through the Conflict Transformation Workshops, WISCOMP tried to build constituencies of youth leaders who could envision a new kind of democracy where women and men co-create a just and equitable society; where men emerge as women’s partners in the quest to end gender-based violence.


The Workshops sought to provide an invigorating and ‘safe’ space where issues related to Jammu and Kashmir could be discussed with candor by the third and fourth generations of Indians, Pakistanis, and Kashmiris. They attempted to facilitate honest dialogue, initiate trust-building processes, build consensus on peacebuilding proposals,74 and explore the possibilities for partnerships across the fault-lines of conflict.

Multiple methodologies and formats including discourse analysis, opinion poll analysis, stakeholder analysis, quiz, film discussions, and participant group presentations were employed to formulate a blueprint for the transformation of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. With respect to themes, the Workshop modules included discussions on identity and nationalism; local perspectives on peace and justice; political participation and the articulation of stakeholder aspirations; and demography and geopolitics, among others. Listed here are some of the issues and shifts in perceptions that emerged from the Workshop dialogues on Jammu and Kashmir.

A first step: There was an across-the-board acceptance that the people of Jammu and Kashmir (on both sides of the LoC) should be the primary stakeholders as also the primary recipients of any peace divided. Their aspirations and concerns should guide

74 While the narrative reports of each annual Workshop have documented these proposals, three formulations (from the 2001, 2005 and 2006 Workshops) are included here as examples to demonstrate the kind of understanding and consensus that the participants were able to reach. These are shared in Annexure 2.
the government-level dialogues, which should, as a first step, address basic human needs (freedom of speech, removal of poverty, provision of healthcare, quality education, and gainful employment). There was also agreement on the need for a sustained political dialogue, which focused on good governance, minority rights, and devolution of power (particularly with respect to greater local control of natural resources).

A year-wise study of alumni reflections on the Kashmir conflict revealed that the optimism of the mid-2000s when President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh talked about ‘out-of-box solutions’, ‘soft borders’, and ‘demilitarizing the region’, had infused hope among the young leaders who participated in the Workshops (during this period). However, the incidents of violence and crises (in both countries) that followed one another in quick succession post-2007 belied the expectations of a sustained forward movement. For example, participants at the 2012 Workshop expressed disappointment at the slow pace of political progress and even hinted that both New Delhi and Islamabad were intentionally being sluggish in their support for cross-LoC contact. Some Kashmiri participants attributed this to the fear (in both governments) that cross-LoC initiatives could lead to the creation of a separate Jammu and Kashmir identity, independent of India and Pakistan. These challenges notwithstanding, the Workshops did generate among the participants a practical hope that their generation could end the cycles of hate and violence. For example, Asifa Hasan, an Islamabad-based researcher currently pursuing a PhD in Energy and Environmental Policy at the University of Delaware, USA, penned down the following reflections in 2008 (three years after her participation in the WISCOMP Workshop):

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 realization among young Pakistanis and Indians that maintaining the conflict is not conducive to our long-term development. That carrying the burden of hatred is hard. This is primarily because our generation enjoys the privilege of being far enough from the memories of partition to think objectively about the animosity between India and Pakistan.

Participants thus invested faith in their ability to sustain the dialogue and arrive at a collective understanding of needs, rights, and aspirations. They refrained from defining a single-point goal, and instead attempted to address issues as part of a process that was inclusive, democratic, and just. The hope was that the outcome dictated by such a process would be one around which consensus would become possible. In this respect, the following question was seen as a guiding compass for the dialogue: ‘Have
we set in motion a process for the kind of goals we want to see realized 10 or 20 years from today?’

**Transforming the LoC from a barrier to a bridge:** Participants debated the peacebuilding potential of an ‘intra-Kashmir dialogue’ and initiatives such as the cross-LoC bus service and trade. Seeing these as potential vehicles through which autonomy and devolution could be initiated, they made a wide range of recommendations. For example, the institutionalization of educational, media, and cultural exchanges (involving school and college students and educators, journalists, artists, writers, and musicians from the two sides of Kashmir); promotion of cross-LoC tourism; establishment of a free trade zone across the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, et al. The need to build supporting institutional mechanisms, such as banking and communication facilities was underscored for the facilitation of these initiatives. A good number of participants from the Kashmir Valley, however, disagreed with this approach to visualize the LoC as a vibrant zone of travel, trade, and cooperation. They felt that trade and other cross-LoC linkages should not be seen as a substitute for the goal of political self-determination. A researcher from Srinagar, echoing the views of some of his compatriots, said: ‘Kashmiris didn’t lay down their lives in the 1990s to do business with the other side. We want to go back to the core political issues.’

Even those who supported cross-LoC contact said that given its poor track record, it would be naïve to invest too much faith in its peacebuilding potential. For example, it was as recent as July 2012 that the first group of civil society activists and traders from Pakistan Administered Kashmir were allowed to travel on the cross-LoC bus for a meeting in Srinagar. All other civil society exchanges between the two Kashmirs take place in New Delhi/Islamabad or in third countries. The restriction of the bus services to only divided families was criticized. An open approach which allows the free movement

---

**Borders cannot be redrawn but we can work towards making them irrelevant—towards making them just lines on a map. People on both sides of the LoC should be able to move more freely and trade with one another… The vision that guides us is that the destinies of our peoples are interlinked…When our neighbors live in peace, we live in peace.**

I dream of a day when, while retaining our respective identities, one can have breakfast at Amritsar, lunch at Lahore, and dinner in Kabul. That was how my forefathers lived.

*Dr. Manmohan Singh*

*Former Indian Prime Minister*

---

75 In comparison to the Indian and Pakistani participants, Kashmiris spoke with clarity on the steps that need to be taken for long-term peace and security. They also reported a higher awareness of issues surrounding the conflict as well as of the field of peacebuilding.
of all people in Jammu and Kashmir (across the LoC) was seen as a prerequisite for a genuine ‘intra-Kashmir dialogue’. The deepening and widening of this dialogue is crucial to its success as a peacebuilding strategy.

**A deficit of leadership:** Participants articulated a deficit of trust with respect to the political leadership in their countries, stating that while creative and inclusive solutions have been proposed, political leaders have shown less courage and limited foresight in their ability to implement these. For example, reference was made to the resolution of the Siachen conflict, which has been put on hold by the political and military leadership. The mutual trust needed to implement the peace proposal for Siachen does not exist. There was also the view that the political class, the military, the clergy, and the bureaucracy—in addition to the militants, mercenaries, and weapons’ manufacturers—have developed vested interests in the perpetuation of conflict and chaos in Jammu and Kashmir. In this context, participants emphasized the need for an honest, strong-willed political leadership, which could move beyond rituals and tokenism to demonstrate the courage to address the grievances and aspirations of those affected by the conflict and foreground these in efforts to build common ground. The highhanded behavior of the Indian army in the Valley, particularly with respect to human rights violations, came in for widespread criticism. There was an across-the-board rejection of the stringent mechanisms of state repression, particularly the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which has been misused to violate human rights and commit acts of sexual violence against innocent civilians. In fact, some participants felt it was difficult to condemn the violence of the militants in the context of state violence. Yet, they did agree that in the long run the renunciation of violence, in all its forms and from all sources, would create an enabling context for a more constructive political dialogue.

**Peace polls and colliding narratives:** The Workshop dialogues engaged with the various ‘peace polls’ that have been conducted on both sides of the LoC to gauge people’s opinions and aspirations. Such polls which seek to foreground the voices of the people in the agenda of the peace process, have often generated surprising results. For instance, they have revealed that Kashmiris (on both sides of the LoC) are in agreement on the following issues: they want an end to the corruption that has destroyed governance and development (on both sides of the LoC); they want their governments to tackle the widespread problem of unemployment; they want a secular state without borders; they want their sons and daughters to study with children from other faiths and communities; they want an end to all forms of human rights violations.

---

and speedy delivery of justice; they want India and Pakistan to stop using Kashmiris for their own vested interests; and, they want to be masters of their own destinies and, to this end, they want negotiations in good faith. Affirming the findings of these polls, Workshop participants from Kashmir spoke of the daily hardships generated by food shortage, power outages, and the paucity of schools and colleges that offered quality education. Where they differed was in their vision of *azaadi* and definition of *peace* because what participants from the Valley wanted was not what those from Jammu and Ladakh desired. Similarly, the views of participants from Muzaffarabad and Rawalakot were not only varied internally (particularly with respect to mainstream Pakistani opinion), but also differed from the concerns of those living on the Indian side. These differing and, at times, colliding narratives led to conversations that were difficult and that questioned what participants had hitherto considered to be ‘the truth’ about the conflict.

**A space of trust:** What is, however, significant from a conflict transformation perspective is the provision of a space and context for a constructive dialogue between these diverse and colliding narratives. There was, in fact, a deep awareness of the rare opportunity that the WISCOMP Workshops provided for Kashmiris from either side of the LoC to meet one another—as well as for Pakistanis to meet Kashmiris from the Indian side and for Indians to meet Kashmiris from the Pakistani side.

*Mubarika (center) participates in a role-play where she and her colleagues from Pakistan simulated the position of the Indian government on the Kashmir conflict.*

‘I never had a chance to meet as many people from the Kashmir Valley as I did at this Workshop. It has been so enriching for me to listen to them, particularly those from the border regions such as Kargil…because the only way I, as a Pakistani, can learn about them is through the media. It was very enlightening to listen to the experiences of people who have actually lived near the LoC.’

*Ms. Mubarika Aijazuddin*

*Business Enabling Environment Specialist, Chemonics International, Lahore (Alumnus, 2007 Workshop)*
In fact, 56% of the Kashmiri participants (from the Indian side) who attended the 2012 Conflict Transformation Workshop said that the WISCOMP dialogue represented their first meeting with Pakistanis. The percentage of participants from Jammu and Kashmir who had never met a Kashmiri from the other side of the LoC was even higher (96.5%). As a result, these ‘intra-Kashmir’ meetings took on a different meaning, reflecting a more intense and overwhelming experience for the Kashmiri participants. For example, Imran Khan, a Kashmiri associated with Khudi Pakistan, a grassroots movement in Islamabad (and Alumnus, 2012 Workshop), stated that the Kashmir sessions were an eye-opener because they provided first-hand information about ‘life on the other side’. Through the dialogues at these sessions, he also rediscovered his Kashmiri identity:

I discovered how deep-rooted my Kashmiri identity was. Most of the time in Azad Kashmir, our identity is sort of subsumed by our Pakistani identity because the relationship we have with Pakistan is different from the relationship that J&K has with India. So the feelings that I have had after meeting my Kashmiri friends from the other side [of the LoC] have motivated me to work for the resolution of the Kashmir issue and for peace in the region. When I returned home from the WISCOMP Workshop, I told my Pakistani and Kashmiri friends that India is not the enemy of the Kashmiris.

Raja Wasim Khan, a Muzaffarabad-based journalist (and Alumnus, 2012 Workshop) shared the following feedback after his interaction with participants from the Indian side of Jammu and Kashmir:

Before departure to Delhi [for the WISCOMP Workshop], I had a totally different opinion regarding the people of Jammu and Kashmir on the Indian side. I had a perception that all of them consider themselves as one entity of Kashmir which is affected due to the conflict. My perception changed dramatically when I had discussions with individuals from different regions of Kashmir including Jammu, Leh, and the Valley. I found that they consider themselves as separate entities having diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds—and different political aspirations. I personally believe that such workshops are opportunities for knowledge sharing and acquaintance and can reveal the true picture of the conflict. However, I still feel a thirst for sharing with Kashmiris from the Indian side.

The figure at Workshops in earlier years was even higher with between 70 and 80 percent of the Kashmiri participants (from the Indian side) stating that their first encounter with Pakistanis took place at the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshops.
Avineet Parashar, a Lecturer of Political Science in the State Education Department in Jammu stated that her ‘point of view had expanded’ after meeting individuals from sub-regions such as Doda, Ladakh, Muzaffarabad, and Srinagar. Referring to differences she had with a co-participant from Baramulla, she credited the dialogic methodology of the WISCOMP Workshop in helping her to befriend him and increase the understanding between their two divergent points of view (which were representative of the regional and religious conflict between Jammu and Kashmir). The fact that they were ‘still friends’ and that each respected the other’s viewpoint despite the variance in their political visions for Jammu and Kashmir was seen as a ‘huge achievement’ of the Workshops.

The value of this unique opportunity that participants were offered to dialogue across fault-lines cannot be emphasized enough. There is little awareness of the ground reality in Kashmir on either side of the LoC owing to restrictions on face-to-face meetings between Kashmiris (from the two sides) as also the subtle official opposition to meetings between ordinary people from Srinagar, Delhi, Islamabad, and Muzaffarabad. For instance, it is an arduous process for a Srinagar resident to travel to Muzaffarabad if s/he does not belong to a ‘divided family’. A Kashmiri writer noted that the challenge begins with the very first step of acquiring a passport. For Kashmiris from the Pakistani side, internal clearances from the interior ministry of Pakistan can be more difficult than a visa from the Indian High Commission. These have caused unimaginable harm to peacebuilding efforts in the region.

What also emerged in stark terms were the limited avenues for interaction between young people who live in Kashmir and those who lead relatively ‘normal’ and ‘privileged’ lives in the metropolis. Kashmir represents but one example of the widening gap between those who live in ‘shining’ India/Pakistan and those on the margins of the state whose lives and livelihoods are under constant threat. For example, a Mumbai-based school teacher, while referring to his interaction with a Kashmiri participant from Srinagar, said,

*She represents the angst of the Kashmiri youth, which a lot of us who are not from Kashmir have no experience of…We hear about this amorphous identity [Kashmiri] and other stuff [about the conflict] only on the 9:00 p.m. television news.*

A political science teacher at a Kolkata-based university shared the following in the post-Workshop feedback form:

*Talking with the Kashmiri participants was an eye-opener. The Workshop helped me to see the conflict through Kashmiri eyes.*
The Workshops also witnessed the building of relationships between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, which had been severed with the exodus of the latter from the Valley. Transcending politics and ideology, they bridged the ‘chasm of silence’ and revived old cross-community friendships—an aspiration that their parents were unable to fulfill. Ather Zia, a Kashmiri Muslim writer and former civil servant, reflecting on this experience, said: It was after a decade that I saw my Pandit brethren in such a close setting at the Conflict Transformation Workshop. The meeting was not easy.

While Ather used poetry to communicate her emotions, other Kashmiri participants visited each other’s reality by listening to ‘the other’s’ stories of trauma. There was also a thirst to be heard, to have others acknowledge and empathize with the trauma that their families and communities had endured. Muslim and Pandit participants were surprised at how quickly they were able to understand each other; perhaps

**Engaging with diverse narratives**

On the fourth day of the Workshop, a film on Kashmir was screened, which depicted people’s suffering. I glanced around the room during the film screening and a Hindu Pandit participant caught my attention as she was crying. Her tears moved me intensely. Following this incident, I could not help thinking about the misery of the common person, the beauty of whose entire life is eclipsed by such conflict…Later, I learnt that the Pandit woman 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 in-laws.

I had grown up watching 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’. In the forefront now was this Kashmiri woman, her dreams, and her pain. The sufferings of victims on both sides were not sufferings for state interests…They were suffering for their homes, their families, and for the association they shared with the land they were born 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 aspirations. Not the Pakistani or Indian version of the conflict. Consequently, the importance of resolving the conflict increased many fold…I began asking what peace meant to an individual and therefore what it should mean to the state, rather than the other way round.

Nausheen Wasi
Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations
University of Karachi, Pakistan
because, as Ather put it, ‘the experience of pain was so similar’. An important learning for WISCOMP from these dialogues was the need to foreground psychosocial healing as an important dimension of peacebuilding in Kashmir.

**Kashmiri views of India and Pakistan:** Kashmiris from the Indian side expressed a general sense of disillusionment, with both India and Pakistan. Words such as ‘oppressor’ and ‘colonizer’ were often used by Kashmiri participants to refer to the Indian state. And Indian people were invariably seen as ‘ignorant’ and ‘communal’. Let us, for instance, look at the baseline comments of a PhD scholar from the Valley (currently living in Delhi). She penned down her perception of India in the following words:

> A nation that, despite its claim of democracy and ideals of justice and rights, makes me feel like an alien in my own place (Kashmir), constantly under the vigil of the gun, limiting my freedom within barbed wires and barricades. In India, I see a country highly regarded by its people; but for me and people around me, it’s nothing less than a violator of our human rights.

About Pakistan, she added:

> A country that has failed me just the way India has... A country I can never depend upon for my freedom from barbed wires and barricades. It could have been an ideal model for other Islamic nations but has failed to do so. Infected by extremist forces, it hardly ever sees a stable government leading it.

Although some bridges were built between the Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri participants from India, the sense of alienation among the former runs deep. There is an urgent need for trust-building between young people who live in Kashmir and those who live in the metropolis of India untouched by the fear and trauma that the former experience.

At the Conflict Transformation Workshops, I had the opportunity to meet strangers in whose name vested interests have long been trying to divide the two nations. If hundreds of such Conflict Transformation Workshops are organized for the people of India and Pakistan, peace in Kashmir can be restored on a large scale. With such initiatives, the shops of those who sell violence for their own vested interests will shut down...Students and activists at the Workshop felt that politicians (on both sides of the LoC) have not prioritized the humanitarian concerns as much as they should...They have ignored the full consequences of violence and the condition of survivors.

**Mr. Javed Ahmad Tak**  
Chairman  
*Humanity Welfare Organization Helpline*  
*Bijbehara, Kashmir*  
*(Alumnus, 2005 Workshop)*
Kashmiris from the Pakistani side were also critical of the Pakistani state. A grassroots peacebuilder from Muzaffarabad shared the following perception of Pakistan:

*Pakistan is a country that is struggling to become a stable and progressive democratic society...It needs rule of law and social justice. We have had a troubled past and even now the country is passing through a difficult time: Pakistan is fighting against terrorist groups created by its own military establishment and the state is also trying to quell an insurgency in Balochistan.*

A Muzaffarabad-based journalist saw Pakistanis as ‘overly patriotic’, and stated:

*Many are unfortunately brainwashed by the state-promoted ideology of nationalism...and held hostage by a few. However, now more Pakistanis are looking at the politics and history of the country more critically and challenging the dominant narratives of the state elites...*
His colleague from Rawalakot added:

_Amidst nascent democracy and weak institutions, the larger public is wrestling the battle for optimism which requires some time._

**Shifts in perceptions:** The baseline and endline studies pointed to discernible shifts in perceptions among the Workshop participants vis-à-vis Kashmir. Although the baseline study revealed divergences in the participants’ views on Kashmir (and inevitably, their understanding of nationalism), these were significantly less in the endline responses. Participants (Kashmiris and non-Kashmiris) showed a tendency to avoid recommendations/proposals where one side lost. Instead, they emphasized the principle of mutual consent and the need to map the aspirations of _all_ the stakeholders. For example, a peace researcher from Srinagar, stated in her post-Workshop feedback:

_Everyone, Indians and Pakistanis, Kashmiris and non-Kashmiris, were open to listening, understanding, and cooperating. This was a great achievement._

A Srinagar-based activist who had perceived Indians to be ‘highly patriotic and arrogant about their political ideologies’ in the baseline questionnaire, changed her views after the WISCOMP dialogue. Referring to the Indians at the Workshop, she said:

_Most of them were friendly. They understood my views when I explained to them how we Kashmiris live under the constant threat of the gun. After listening to my stories, they understood why I (and many other Kashmiris) have such a bitter attitude towards the security forces...There are Indians who are different from the rest—people who raise their voice against the oppression that is carried out by their government._

A Kashmiri researcher from Rawalakot (currently teaching at a university in Islamabad) found Indians to be ‘very friendly, industrious, and progressive...an exemplary blend of diverse cultures and religions with social harmony’. However, he added that Indians (at least those he met at the Workshop) were:

_Unaware about the general perceptions of Pakistani people...Lack of communication has resulted in many hypotheses as people have their stereotypes about us. And people from the Indian side of Kashmir don’t have any knowledge about the Pakistani side of Kashmir._

**Diversity and difference:** The religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Jammu and Kashmir was the source of much discussion at the Workshops. Since participants represented different regions such as Srinagar, Jammu, Doda, Leh, Kargil,
Muzaffarabad, and Rawalakot, the messiness and complexity of the ground reality was highlighted in stark terms. For many, the knowledge of this complex diversity represented an important learning from the Workshop dialogues. This knowledge in turn resulted in a greater hesitation to make generalizations or to speak with certitudes. For example, the baseline and endline questionnaires had asked participants to share their views on the ‘primary causes’ of the conflicts between India and Pakistan. With respect to Kashmir, it was observed that after the dialogues, participants were hesitant to express ‘strong agreement’ or ‘strong disagreement’ vis-a-vis the centrality of this issue. They instead chose the ‘neutral/unsure’ and ‘mild agreement/mild disagreement’ categories, stating that the conflict was the result of an amalgam of various issues, exacerbated by layers of mistrust and hostility added over the years. For instance, a Lahore-based communications professional stated in the post-Workshop evaluation, ‘It [the situation in Kashmir] was not as black-and-white as PTV footage had made it out to be.’

An Islamabad-based security analyst added:

_We have been fed a great deal about Kashmir. But I did not totally agree with the government’s stance because I wanted to meet a real-life ordinary Kashmiri and hear his story in person, and not have any stooges of India or Pakistan tell me anything. The Conflict Transformation Workshops provided this opportunity._

Participants however recognized the challenge that fragmentation along religious and ethnic lines has posed to efforts to build cultures of coexistence. With each new crisis and act of violence, the fault-lines between communities that live in the three regions of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh deepen. These are further exacerbated by the insecurities surrounding livelihood and the very basic human needs of access to food and shelter as also the human desire to live with a certain degree of self-respect and dignity. Yet, even as participants talked about these fault-lines, they felt that the only way forward was to listen to the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders, without judgment or acrimony. The establishment of cross-regional institutions such as a pan-Kashmir Assembly with legislators from both sides of the LoC as its members (who would be responsible for their respective districts and be empowered to solve local problems) was also proposed.

The Workshop dialogues thus helped participants—Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri—to learn multiple truths, engage with differing views of the conflict, and understand the aspirations of _all_ the stakeholders. Several participants from the Valley in fact valued the Workshop space for the awareness and sensitivity it generated among ordinary Indians and Pakistanis about the situation in Kashmir—on both sides of the LoC.
4.3. ‘The Past That Lies Before Us’\textsuperscript{78}: Partition Narratives

*History is alive. It needs recognition and attention...A group’s identity is linked in large part to what its members remember and keep alive. In settings of protracted conflict, the mixed history of violence among groups gives each...a collective memory of times when they were deeply violated by the other. The trauma remembered renews itself as part of the unconscious psyche of group identity and is passed down across generations...The chosen trauma provides justification for intergroup defense, preemptive violence, or even revenge. The dates remembered may go way back in history but they are present as if they happened yesterday...[They] are reconstructed in the present...with each cycle of renewed violence at the hands of the other.* 

\textit{John Paul Lederach}\textsuperscript{79}

The Workshop sessions that ‘dealt with the past’ were an important benchmark to observe whether the participants—representing the third and fourth generations—were able to transcend the hostility of earlier generations and ‘re-story’ a new, more positive narrative about their relationship with ‘the other’. Participants, both Indians and Pakistanis, came to the Workshops with vivid stories of what their parents and grandparents had experienced during the mass violence that surrounded the 1947 partition. Even though they had not directly experienced this violence, they narrated it with intense passion and based their prejudices of ‘the other’ on it. Also articulated was the view that they should not forget what their families went through during those tumultuous times. It seemed as if, on both sides of the divide, the memories of 1947 had become what psychiatrist Vamik Volkan has defined as a ‘chosen trauma’\textsuperscript{80}—

\textsuperscript{78} This phrase is borrowed from a chapter in John Paul Lederach’s book *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* titled ‘On Time: The Past That Lies Before Us’ (Oxford University Press, 2005).


\textsuperscript{80} According to Vamik Volkan, the term ‘chosen trauma’ refers to the shared image of an event that causes a large group (based on various markers of identity, such as ethnicity, religion, or nationality) to feel helpless, victimized, and humiliated by another group. No group intends to be victimized, but it can choose to psychologize and mythologize the event. When this occurs, the group carries the image of that event—along with associated feelings of hurt and shame—from generation to generation. During this trans-generational transmission, the image of the event emerges as a significant group marker; and gradually the group draws the shared image of this traumatic event into its very identity.’
at the core of which were claims about ultimate truth and authority, diametrically opposite to one another on either side of the conflict divide.81

The potency of ‘partition stories’ from over 67 years ago is evident from the fact that these narratives continue to shape the worldviews and identities—personal, religious, and national—of many Indians and Pakistanis. Even those in the 20–40 age-groups, see partition as an event where their side was victimized, humiliated, and displaced—and as a result, their families were forced to live a life of penury, having lost access to their property and other sources of wealth. They continue to exhibit the pain of this narrative, allowing it to shape their identities and, equally significant, their perceptions of the ‘enemy’.

Since the majority of participants came with no direct experience of cross-border contact, most of their perceptions about ‘the other’ related to the bitter tales of partition—where the victims and the villains were clearly defined. Narrated by grandparents and reinforced by the media and the education system, these stories, for the most part, were about the loss of loved ones, of regret and anger, the end of childhood memories and youthful dreams, the experiences of hunger and poverty that refugees in a new land faced, and the incessant longing to visit the place that was still considered ‘home’. For the Indians, ‘the other’ (the people of Pakistan) were responsible for this suffering, and vice versa.

Although these narratives of the violence surrounding the 1947 partition are well documented, WISCOMP’s purpose of engaging with this theme was to assist third and fourth generation Indians and Pakistanis to exorcize the ghosts of partition that had enslaved and imprisoned their forebears and to build anew a repertoire of positive engagement and positive stories.82 In this context, the central question that the Conflict Transformation Workshops sought to address was whether the participants could collectively ‘re-story’ a more positive, historical narrative that highlighted the good deeds of Hindus and Muslims, Indians and Pakistanis, during those tumultuous days.

81 These were stories primarily about the devastating impact of partition on the families that the participants represented. For instance, losing access to a place of worship that held significance, to the village/town that was once ‘home’, or to the school that held one’s childhood memories.

82 The dialogues on partition were usually held a few days into the Workshop once WISCOMP was confident that a certain level of trust had been established among the participants. The building of friendships and the participants’ faith in the safety of the Workshop space were seen as prerequisites for sessions that invited participants to share intimate stories of how their families and communities were affected by the violence in 1947. Integral to these dialogues was the use of creative forms of expression such as art, film, and theater to help participants engage more holistically with this theme. For instance, a primary purpose of the film workshops was to use cinema to visually portray the suffering on both sides as also to instill in the younger generations the commitment that such violence should never be repeated.
To WISCOMP, it appeared that the only way forward was to build the capacity of young Indians and Pakistanis to ‘cooperatively re-narrate their world’ by creating positive narratives about ‘the other’. Such a process generates the possibility of coexistence by helping individuals to unlearn adversarial assumptions about ‘the other’ that were taken as a given and to create room for critical thinking and introspection about the mistakes committed by one’s own side. The hope also was that the Workshop dialogues on partition could serve as a bridge between the past which had divided earlier generations and a future in which common aspirations and dreams could perhaps unite the next generation of leaders.

In this context, conversations about alternative, people’s versions of history that challenged ‘mainstream’ understandings of national identity and its relationship with the events of 1947 have been integral to the Workshop curriculum. Here, participants were exposed to two important dimensions: one, exposure to the suffering that people on ‘the other’ side experienced; and two, emphasis on hitherto hidden accounts of courage and compassion where Hindus and Muslims reached out to one another to save lives and helped each other to travel safely to ‘the other’ country. The curriculum also drew on the discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation to help participants develop an empathetic understanding of ‘the other’s’ version of the truth. The hope was that by foregrounding these, participants could perhaps construct a new narrative of 1947, which recognized that there were victims and villains on both sides and that, just maybe, the aspirations for a peaceful, prosperous, and interdependent future were more powerful than the ‘chosen traumas’ of the past.

In this respect, the Conflict Transformation Workshops were uniquely positioned because they brought together individuals who—by virtue of their strategic location between the generations whose lives were impacted by partition and the younger generations to come—could play a decisive role as bridge-builders. Many participants had close interactions with grandparents (and in some cases, even parents) about their first-hand experiences of partition. Yet, these participants would now be the first generation to parent children who will hear only secondary accounts of partition. The stories they tell their children would determine if the cycle of hate and retribution could be broken. If these youth leaders could share with their families, communities, and organizations the suffering that ‘the other’ side had also experienced—without minimizing anyone’s pain—as well as stories about the courage and compassion that different communities demonstrated by protecting minorities, WISCOMP believed that they could play a vital role in facilitating a genuine process of reconciliation between Indians and Pakistanis—at least with respect to the narratives of partition.
A critical stage in these dialogues was represented by a set of questions that WISCOMP encouraged participants to investigate: What happened to ‘the other side’? Did the enemy suffer as well? If yes, did the knowledge of this suffering change their perception of the enemy? How did they feel when they discovered that the narrative of ‘the other’ was similar to theirs, except that the roles of victims and villains were reversed?

The conversations that followed were encouraging. Meenakshi Chhabra, an Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences, Lesley University, Cambridge, USA (and facilitator of two Workshop dialogues on partition), shared that feelings of connection and empathy were often discernible.

*There was anger and frustration as to which group’s historical and political narratives were right...Yet, 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’.*

*The India-Pakistan conflict was a big part of my growing up narrative. My grandparents and parents had moved from Pakistan to India as refugees in 1947. From them, I constantly heard accounts of how ‘the other’ was responsible for my mother’s lost childhood and my father’s lost dreams. It was not till my mid-30s, when I moved to the US, that I met someone from Pakistan for the first time. For the first time, I heard about the pain and suffering that ‘the other side’ had experienced. It was a humbling experience.*
This represented a moment of reckoning for many participants because the dialogue would bring them to a fork: do they allow politics and one-sided versions of history to nourish their hate for ‘the other side’? Or, do they decide to shed the ‘baggage’ of the past and connect with one another over the surprisingly large number of experiences and aspirations that connected them?

The endline study pointed overwhelmingly to the latter. Although the sessions on partition were often intense and draining, they showed participants how their own family narratives had a mirror image across the border. This in turn led to significant shifts in worldviews and even some powerful moments when the group felt that the ‘spirit of reconciliation had entered the dialogue room’. Anuradha Choudry, Research Associate, Center for Indian Psychology, Jain University, Bangalore, stated:

*The session on partition served as a kind of catharsis for a generation which, apparently unaffected, still carries the trauma of partition in its subconscious mass memory.*

For some participants, these sessions also facilitated a more positive construction of identity where conceptions of the self were delinked from adversarial perceptions of ‘the other’. Most significantly, there was consensus that while young women and men in the two countries cannot undo the trauma that earlier generations have endured, they can build a different kind of future for their children and initiate some healing at the individual and family levels.

In terms of methodology, WISCOMP used the lenses of appreciative inquiry and oral history interviews to help participants search for partition stories that highlighted acts of compassion where Hindus and Muslims helped each other during the mass violence and exodus of populations. When participants began their research on such narratives, they were surprised to find several examples of cross-community friendship and inter-faith harmony that predated partition. In fact, they did not have to look far because, much to their surprise, these narratives lay buried within their own family’s lived history. Unearthing them depended on the kind of questions that were asked—whether the questions focused on the brutality of the mobs that wrecked lives or whether they inquired about alternative stories where individuals reached out to one another across the fault-lines of religion and nationality to protect vulnerable people.

For example, Zahid Shahab Ahmed, an Assistant Professor at the Center for International Peace and Stability, National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad (and Alumnus, 2005 Workshop) unearthed the following story about the good deeds of his grandfather during partition:

---

83 Participants often articulated surprise during the dialogue (or in emails to WISCOMP after the Workshops) over the ease with which they were able to build friendships with peers from ‘the other’ side.
My grandfather was the headmaster of a school in Toba Tek Singh (now in Punjab, Pakistan). He 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 1980s. Through their expression of gratitude for our grandfather, they provided us with crucial insights into our family’s association with the partition.

When Zahid shared this story at the Workshop, it affected everyone in the room—Indians and Pakistanis, Hindus and Muslims. In the flash of a moment, an important discovery had been made: stories of cross-community friendship and coexistence were deliberately suppressed so that a dominant, adversarial narrative where ‘we were the victims’ and ‘they were the villains’ could be constructed. Many such stories were unearthed by Workshop participants, which in turn helped them to ‘be at peace with the past’ and to refrain from generalizations.

An important outcome of this has been the emergence of interest among some alumni to document stories of inter-community harmony that predated 1947 and to make these available to schools and colleges so that such accounts can be highlighted in classroom discussions. Some participants have even begun to explore the possibility of writing a joint historical narrative of the freedom struggle and the 1947 partition.84

Another common theme that emerged from the partition dialogues was the reaction of grandparents when they learnt that their grandchildren would be participants in an India-Pakistan peacebuilding workshop. While the reactions ranged from disapproval to hopefulness, they all made one request—the wish of a lifetime—that through this dialogue, their grandchildren should visit the land of their birth and childhood memories. As Stuti Bhatnagar, a peace and conflict researcher currently based in Dubai (and former WISCOMP staff member) put it:

My grandparents expressed the longing that one day, I would be able to visit the land of their past through these Workshops and thus complete their journey, at least, in spirit.85

---

84 In this context, the WISCOMP committee that selects participants for the dialogues took the strategic decision to ensure that young historians (particularly those teaching in schools) formed a sizeable group at each Workshop.

Unfortunately, Stuti was not able to secure a visa to visit Pakistan, despite repeated attempts. Her colleague from Peshawar, Saira Bano Orakzai\(^{86}\), however did manage to make this ‘journey of a lifetime’. Saira attended the Conflict Transformation Workshop in 2005, which transformed into an intensely intimate and emotional journey. While she shared the ‘partition stories’ of her ancestors within the four walls of the Workshop space, one evening after the dialogue concluded, she set out in search of her great-grandmother’s grave whose ‘home’ was Delhi. It was her family’s wish that she make this trip. Recalling the melancholy in her mother’s eyes when she boarded the plane to Delhi, Saira sent the following note to WISCOMP after the Workshop:

*I did not quite realize the importance of this trip when my mother told me to visit my great-grandmother’s grave. But as I stood at the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi talking to the shrine in-charge who helped me locate her grave, I realized the significance of this visit. I was the first one in my family to visit her grave in 60 years. And this was made possible by the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop...While I deeply respect the beliefs and ideologies of the partition generation for which they sacrificed a great deal, these should not be converted into a permanent wall of hatred.*

Saira’s views resonated for many participants who felt that without discounting the sacrifices of their ancestors, their generation had the capacity to dispassionately engage with the past.

Some participants came from families where the experiences of forced displacement were not discussed as these were perceived to be too painful to recollect. For them, the WISCOMP Workshops provided a context to ask.
parents and grandparents about a past around which a shroud of silence had been
wrapped. For this group of participants, the Workshops marked the beginning of an
important phase in their journey as they discovered that the roots—and in some cases
even blood ties—were closer than ever imagined.

The journey to the WISCOMP Workshops, therefore, became for many, an intensely
personal and intimate encounter with ‘the other’. For instance, during one of the
partition sessions, an Indian participant discovered that her Pakistani dialogue partner
lived in a neighborhood that was once ‘home’ to her ancestors. This led to an emotional
outpouring of a longing now subsumed by contemporary narratives of national identity.
At such moments, the conversations went beyond culture, religion, and politics to
include an intimate dialogue between human beings united in their common experience
of loss, displacement, and a yearning to visit places that were once home to their
families.

The partition sessions also brought out in stark terms the many paradoxes that surround
the India-Pakistan relationship. For instance, participants talked about experiences
in third countries where Indians and Pakistanis were not only ‘the best of friends’,
but they also supported each other emotionally and financially. Reference was also
made to the reality that while a flight between the two countries takes barely 45
minutes, it could take years, even a lifetime, to secure a visa to visit the other side.
Or, the fact that for some communities, Indian Sikhs for instance, the most significant
sites of pilgrimage lie on ‘the other side’ of the border. Yet, perhaps the greatest irony
is the presence of ‘blood ties’ that 67 years of hostility have not snapped. Participants
who came from ‘divided families’, where aunts, uncles, and cousins lived on ‘the
other side’ of the border, pushed all those present in the dialogue space—peers,
resource persons, and the WISCOMP staff—to think more critically about borders
and to question the boundaries between nation, state, and home. For example,
Ambereen Shah, an Account Director with Edelman India, New Delhi and (and alumnus of the 2004 Workshop titled Dialogic Engagement) shared the following
sentiment:

I am an Indian with first cousins in Pakistan and Bangladesh. How could
we dislike each other? My experiences have made me realize that it is only
through dialogue, communication, and ‘just peace’ that we can solve the
conflicts in our regions.

87 For example, Tridivesh Singh Maini, a policy analyst associated with the Jindal School of International
Affairs in Sonipat (and alumnus of the 2007 and 2012 Workshops) has been engaged in advocacy
for easier visa processes for the Indian Sikh community to travel to Pakistan to visit places of
religious significance.
Representing a ‘divided family’ where some members continued to live in Chennai while others migrated to Karachi in 1948, Ishtiaq Mehkri, a journalist and 2004 Workshop alumnus talked about his relationship with India, which came full circle when he fell in love with a girl from Chennai and decided to marry her. The wedding which took place in 1999 (under the shadow of the Kargil conflict) enabled Ishtiaq’s father to visit his ‘hometown’ Chennai, and, more significantly, to visit the graves of his parents after over half-a-century. Commenting on the challenges that confront millions of Indians and Pakistanis like him and Ambereen who have familial ties with ‘the other’, Ishtiaq wrote:

> The great divide between India and Pakistan 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.\(^{88}\)

Through the sharing of these stories, there emerged a consensus on both sides that ‘those tied by the commonality of blood, history, and language have no option but to come closer to each other’.\(^{89}\) It was heartening to see in the endline study that participants spoke in unison when they advocated for reconciliation in the context of the events of 1947. The personal impact of these partition dialogues on participants was far-reaching, even influencing their perception of other bilateral conflicts. In fact, there was the view that if Indians and Pakistanis could achieve such reconciliation, the possibilities for conflict resolution with respect to issues such as Kashmir, terrorism, Siachen, and Sir Creek would increase manifold.

### 4.4. Religion: A Resource for Peace?

Discussions on the relationship between religion, conflict, and peace were integral to the Workshop curriculum, exploring a wide array of questions such as: How might the learnings that we imbibe from our religious traditions influence our work for conflict transformation? Or, do we prefer to adopt a non-religious approach in our work? As peacebuilders, how do we energize those religious beliefs and practices that advance the ideas of peace and multiculturalism? How might religion be used as a resource for violence prevention in regions where it has been used to divide people?

---


\(^{89}\) Although this sentiment was articulated by several participants in their post-Workshop feedback, Kashif Saeed Khan was the first alumnus to pen this down in his 2007 essay titled ‘Between Two Estranged Neighbors’, later published by WISCOMP in the book *Closer to Ourselves*. 
Is it possible to create a vocabulary that engages the best traditions of what are considered to be the domains of the sacred and secular, religion and science?

Even though Marxist interpretations of religion as the ‘opiate of the masses’ were popular among the young scholar-practitioners at the Workshops, they acknowledged the reality is that religion is on the ascendance in South Asia and that faith influences the lives of millions of people in palpable ways. The relationship between what some participants called a ‘scientific’ approach and those who used the lens of religion was a common theme at the Workshops. Although participants lived in spaces where faith had a strong resonance, a good number felt that a ‘scientific’ approach may be more credible. As a grassroots peacebuilder from Islamabad noted,

> When you use a faith-based approach in a hierarchical society like Pakistan where power equations are like those between a feudal and a tenant, then the powerful party will use religion to subjugate the weaker party. In such a situation, a scientific approach which talks about equal rights and democracy is better.

Others felt that religion, and particularly spirituality, had a central role to play in building peace. For instance, a government officer from Peshawar said:

> Spirituality can be very helpful not just for the self, but for parties in conflict. When you have to forgive the enemy and move on, you need to have a lot of strength. And spirituality gives you that strength.

His fellow participant, a Sanskrit teacher from Pondicherry, added:

> The interface between religion, conflict, and peace is a crucial subject that needs to be seriously addressed by the youth of different faiths. We need to have a clear understanding of the basic principles of the different religions we represent and then try and identify those factors that unite or divide us...Discussing government policies on trade, education etc. can serve as a stimulating intellectual exercise...but understanding what my religion and other religions, as practiced, truly stand for, can go a long way in changing the way we look at ourselves, our adversaries, and the world. Moreover, religion is a subject that is very close to our lived experience in South Asia.

While the Workshop discussions on this subject revealed diverse, and at times colliding, viewpoints, the endline study showed that participants agreed on one issue: the need to respect different religious beliefs and to provide an enabling space for the practice and propagation of these. For instance, WISCOMP observed a discernible
shift in perceptions (in the baseline and endline questionnaires) with reference to the statement, ‘Every person should be free to profess, practice, and propagate his/her religion’. The percentage of Pakistani respondents who ‘strongly agreed’ with this statement increased from 78% (baseline) to 98.5% (endline), while the percentage of Indians who ‘strongly agreed’ increased from 84% to 97%.

Some respondents attributed their changed view of ‘other religions’ to the ‘heritage walks’ that WISCOMP organized to different places of worship, which represented a history of shared spaces, syncretic traditions, and multicultural practices. As a youth activist from Karachi stated:

*The Heritage Walks to the Dargah and the Temple were a good ‘hands-on methodology’ to teach about the ‘unity of religions’ and the close relationship that exists between religion, spirituality, and peaceful coexistence.*

Appreciation also came from the Indian participants who had either not visited these spaces or had not engaged with them through the lens of coexistence. In their post-Workshop feedback, the alumni in fact urged WISCOMP to include more places of worship in addition to those representing the Hindu and Islamic faiths. For example, an engagement with the Sikh religion through a visit to a Gurudwara was proposed, particularly since this faith was seen as a potential ‘bridge’ between India and Pakistan.

### 4.5. Media and The Peace Process

The role of the mass media in conflict generation and conflict transformation formed an important focus of discussion at the Workshops. Although the ability of the media to influence public opinion and shape social discourse is well-known, in situations of protracted conflicts it wields a power that is unmatchable. The Fourth Estate can influence perceptions about ‘us’ and ‘them’, thereby significantly impacting processes that exacerbate or reduce prejudice, that increase or reduce trust between groups. In the context of the peace process between India and Pakistan, the media has a scorecard. Although the media (in both countries) is more independent today and less likely to mirror government perspectives, it is not entirely free of vested interests, particularly those that profit from conflict. Its reportage of events such as the Kargil conflict (1999), the Agra Summit (2001), and the Mumbai attacks (2008) generated heated debates about the rights and responsibilities of the print and electronic media, as also the ethics of journalistic intervention and the relationship between media and society. There was considerable introspection within journalistic circles about the extent to which media organizations contributed to the perpetuation of an aggressive and jingoistic nationalism in the two countries. In the years that followed the Mumbai
attacks, some media organizations decided to step forward to do their bit to ‘energize the peace process’ and build trust between Indians and Pakistanis.

Taking on board these issues, WISCOMP designed a module on the constructive role that the media can play in supporting efforts for trust-building and sustainable peace between the two countries. This module became a popular feature of the Workshop curriculum, providing participants with a unique opportunity to interact with senior journalists from both sides of the border who had reported on the bilateral conflict for national dailies and television news channels. Within this context, a diverse range of topics were discussed, for instance: the stereotypes and perceptions that influence a journalist when s/he reports on the bilateral conflict or on developments in ‘the other’ country; the quality of coverage provided by local ‘insider’ journalists and those traveling to the conflict region (for instance, Kashmir) from the outside (and the consequent issues of subjectivity, objectivity, and personal bias); the practice of ‘embedded journalism’ in India and Pakistan; the changing patterns of media ownership and its impact on editorial freedom and news output; the potential of peace journalism/conflict-sensitive journalism (and the consequences of ‘peace partisanship’ on journalistic standards of fairness and objectivity); the role of the alternate media and the vernacular press; the blog and social media as tools of conflict
reportage; the possibilities for peace that could unfold from cross-border partnerships between media companies; and the role that the popular media such as the film and music industries can play in bridging the divides between the two countries.

Popular films, particularly those emanating from Bombay cinema, have come to acquire an unmatchable position in public discourse in both India and Pakistan. Their ability to challenge negative stereotypes and transform ‘enemy images’ on a mass scale has given the film and music industries a unique power to advance liberal and plural values and promote a more positive and nuanced understanding about ‘the other’ side. Influenced by this sensibility, the Workshop curriculum included sessions on Bombay cinema, which addressed the role that the film and music industries have played in offering a more holistic understanding of contentious issues/events (such as Kashmir, partition, religious identity) and in encouraging audiences to visualize the benefits of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation.

WISCOMP also employed different pedagogical methods through which Workshop participants engaged with these issues. In addition to the use of roundtables and film workshops, it organized conflict-reporting simulations and role plays as well as field visits to media offices through which participants were familiarized with the pressures and challenges that journalists work with.

4.6. Scaling Up: In Search of a South Asian Sensibility

Following a mid-term evaluation of the Conflict Transformation Program in 2007, WISCOMP decided to make alterations to the Workshop curriculum in order to address the new regional scenario which had emerged as a result of developments in the post-9/11 world. In the first decade of the 21st century, while the ‘war on terror’ impacted the lives, livelihoods, and political perspectives of scores of Afghans and Pakistanis in very significant ways, it also affected the people of other South Asian countries.

There was the recognition that the post-9/11 world had generated new security challenges, which were common not just to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, but to the South Asian region as a whole. For instance, the suicide bombings at the Indian Embassy in Kabul and the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore, and the Mumbai attacks brought home the reality of a shared threat of terrorism to the region. In this context, WISCOMP advanced the view that the countries of the South Asian region should move beyond issues that have divided them and instead focus on the common challenges that could serve as connectors and that would benefit from regional cooperation. Although it proposed that counter-terrorism methods and the more long-term efforts to build cultures of coexistence would succeed only with the collective efforts of all the countries in the South Asian
region, it also advanced the hypothesis that if Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India collaborated on common security concerns, the peace dividend would multiply and overpower those with a vested interest in the perpetuation of hate and terror.

What was also visible by the mid-2000s was the emergence of Afghanistan as a new arena of ‘proxy conflict’ between India and Pakistan. It appeared as if India and Pakistan had found yet another battlefield to wage a subtle war against each other. Conspiracy theories about ‘the other’s’ intentions in Afghanistan began to exacerbate an already tense bilateral relationship. India’s expanding operations in Afghanistan (with respect to economic and military assistance to the Afghan government), its decision to open consulates there, and its emergence as one of the largest donors in the war-torn country, generated widespread suspicion in Pakistan. It led many Pakistanis to wonder if India was trying to spread its ‘influence’ in Afghanistan with a purpose to encircle Pakistan and destabilize it in the long run.

In addition, WISCOMP was increasingly becoming uneasy with the reality that while young South Asians were well-versed with the cultures and lifestyles of their peers in Europe and the USA, they knew little about their immediate neighbors. Emanating from this ignorance of other South Asian countries were prejudices and stereotypes about the people who inhabited these nations. These, in fact, hindered efforts to build a South Asian sensibility that cut across the deep diversity that exists from Kabul to Dhaka and Srinagar to Colombo.

It was in this context that WISCOMP decided to broaden the bilateral canvas of the Conflict Transformation Workshops and invited the participation of youth leaders from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (in addition to India and Pakistan). Recognizing the growing complexity of grievances and insecurities that the ‘war on terror’ had revealed, the Conflict Transformation Workshops addressed a wider range of issues within the field of peacebuilding while continuing with the focus on building strategic relationships across the horizontal

---

**Select Dialogue Themes**

---

**Workshop participants**

Ms. Pallavi Kaushal (Program Coordinator at VSO India, New Delhi),
Ms. Rangina Hamidi (Founder & President, Kandahar Treasure, Kandahar), and Mr. Hamayoun Khan (Assistant Professor, Lecturer, Strategic Studies Department, National Defense University, Islamabad).
and vertical divisions of societies in conflict. Issues such as the deepening of democracy, human development, and nonviolent methods of waging conflict found resonance among participants from across the region.

The diversity that participants from different parts of South Asia represented enriched not just the dialogues, but also the training sessions in conflict transformation. While participants from Bangladesh shared stories of experiments with microfinance for impoverished women as a peace model, those from Sri Lanka came with experiences that demonstrated the challenges of facilitating reconciliation between Tamils and Sinhalas alongside advocacy for human rights, justice delivery, and reparations. Participants from Nepal highlighted the daily challenges of sustaining peace accords and mainstreaming the perspectives of marginalized communities, including women; while those from Afghanistan brought with them intimate experiences of living with violence and loss. It was heartening to see these participants—who till a few days ago had little understanding of their immediate neighbors—articulating a desire to build a collective sensibility that could pave the way for fruitful regional cooperation and, subsequently, an integrated economic zone.

However, there were also some significant challenges that these South Asian Workshops confronted. The most complex was the hostility between Afghans and Pakistanis and between Indians and Pakistanis in the context of the instability in Afghanistan. Two Annual Workshops—Conflict Transformation and the New Geopolitics of Power (2009) and Gender, Democracy, and Peacebuilding in South Asia (2011)—focused squarely on building relationships between youth leaders from the three countries as also addressing common challenges. At the conclusion of these Workshops, WISCOMP realized that it had underestimated the intensity of the animosity between the Afghan and Pakistani participants. A different kind of preparation was needed for a trilateral dialogue that brought to a common space Afghans, Indians, and Pakistanis.

For instance, Afghan participants accused Pakistan of ‘not demolishing the safe havens for militancy that existed inside its territory…and from which attacks in Afghanistan were planned’. They asked Pakistani participants to engage constructively, saying that without Pakistan’s positive involvement, stability would not come to Afghanistan. The Pakistani participants, however, felt that their country had suffered immensely because of the Afghan crisis. Despite its economic constraints, Pakistan had hosted more than four million Afghan refugees within its territory. Post-9/11, it had lost

---

90 Several Pakistani respondents (who attended the WISCOMP Workshops in 2009 and 2011) expressed surprise and disappointment at the intensity of the anger that emanated from the Afghan delegation.
40,000 civilians and soldiers in its efforts to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. In this context, the Pakistani delegates were critical of the tendency among the Afghans to pin the blame on Pakistan when Afghanistan itself was fractured along myriad fault-lines. For example, Salma Malik, Assistant Professor, Department of Defense and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad (and resource person at the 2009 and 2011 Workshops), stated:

> Many Afghans and Pakistanis are connected to one another through familial and kinship bonds that transcend the Durand Line. Over the last three decades, new layers have been added to this cultural affinity with Pakistan opening up its border to refugees from Afghanistan...However, now there is a loss of trust and too much closeness has bred a lot of animosity between the two countries. Further, the spillover effect of war and the economy that it has perpetuated has had a debilitating impact on the security of Pakistan as much as it has affected Afghanistan. It has given spoilers the power to perpetuate militancy, both within Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Yet, there were also some positive experiences. An Indian graduate student at the University of Delhi, reflecting on this trilateral dialogue, said:

> I realized for the first time that we Indians, Pakistanis, and Afghans share many commonalities, and our uniqueness makes us more special. I was surprised that all of us could interact in Hindu/Urdu. We loved the same food and enjoyed the same music.

The learning from this experience of bringing together participants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India was that future meetings (between the three nationalities) should be preceded by in-country and bilateral trust-building dialogues, and the same group of participants should return to the Workshops so that the conversations can deepen and long-term professional partnerships can be initiated. There is also a need to focus on ‘connectors’ and common issues, which could enhance cooperation between countries in the region. For example, participants identified poverty, violence against women, and the under-utilization of South Asia’s natural resources for the ‘common good’ as areas that could benefit from regional cooperation.

Another challenge that these regional Workshops confronted (in comparison to the India-Pakistan Workshops) was that participants came with very diverse expectations based on the different contexts of conflicts within which they lived. As a result, the conflicts that were brought to the dialogue space were too many in number and involved too many fault-lines for a Workshop that ran for only seven days to address.
Although the WISCOMP team used elicitive methodologies to address these diverse expectations, it was impossible to satisfy all participants over such a short span of time. Yet, it was reassuring to learn that in the endline surveys, an overwhelming majority (87%) of the Afghan, Indian, and Pakistani participants agreed that ‘the cultural affinity of South Asian nations could provide a common platform to transcend political differences’.

In addition to the six themes discussed here, the Workshops included modules on a diverse range of issues and topics. These are listed in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other issues/themes addressed at the Conflict Transformation Workshops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modules on subjects within the field of peacebuilding: conflict analysis, human rights, conflict prevention, justice, and reconciliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust-building and conflict transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitative processes in peacebuilding: The limits and possibilities of intermediary roles (including skill-building modules on active listening, dialogue, and mediation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepening democratic processes: SAARC citizen charter for democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity, difference, and coexistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theater of the Oppressed: A pedagogy for conflict transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonviolent communication and Gandhian methods of waging conflict nonviolently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees and the politics of exile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-track diplomacy between India and Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring the place of the sacred in activism for social change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5

Workshop participants Ms. Khushboo Ejaz (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Kinnaird College, Lahore) and Ms. Farhat Asif (President, Institute of Peace and Diplomacy, Islamabad) interact with Workshop resource person Prof. Satish Kumar (Director, Foundation for National Security Research, New Delhi).

Workshop participant Ms. Amima Sayeed (Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Karachi) makes an intervention during a Roundtable on the role of Indian and Pakistani school teachers in building positive images of ‘the other’ at the Annual Workshop titled Seeking Peace in Changing Worlds: Conflict Transformation and The New Geopolitics of Power. Seated: Workshop participants Mr. Akhter Hussain (Teacher, Higher Secondary School, Doda) and Mr. Nadeem Inamdar (Senior Correspondent, Daily News and Analysis, Pune).

Lt. Gen. Satish Nambiar (Director, United Service Institution of India, New Delhi) and Lt. Gen. Randhir Mehta (Military Advisor, Department of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, New York) at a Workshop discussion on Military CBMs and Interaction on UN Peacekeeping Missions: Avenues for Trust-building between India and Pakistan.

Mr. George Vergheese (Author and Honorary Research Professor, Center for Policy Research, New Delhi), Mr. G. Parthasarathy (Former High Commissioner of India to Pakistan and currently Honorary Research Professor at the Center for Policy Research, New Delhi), Prof. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema (Professor of International Relations at the National Defense University, Islamabad), and Ms. Ashima Kaul (a Peace Practitioner working in Kashmir and a former Consultant with WISCOMP) at a panel discussion titled Conflict Transformation in Jammu and Kashmir. The discussion was held as part of the 2009 Conflict Transformation Workshop.
Over the last 10 years, the Conflict Transformation Workshops have made a significant contribution to the praxis of peacebuilding in South Asia, highlighting both the accomplishments and challenges of facilitating sustained dialogue between youth leaders from across conflict divides.

By its very definition, conflict transformation invites peacebuilders to demonstrate patience, consistency, and faith in a ‘process’ that is incremental and driven by stakeholders. Perhaps the greatest challenge that all 400 South Asian alumni experienced in this journey was the sustenance of the enthusiasm, commitment, and sense of purpose beyond the safe spaces that WISCOMP accorded them. Over the last 12 years, there have been moments when an act of terror or a violent conflagration on the border has made some come close to letting go, giving up, walking away.

Drawing on the participant discussions at the Workshops, their comments in the evaluation sessions and feedback forms, and the inputs they provided in the post-dialogue reflection essays as well as in the baseline and endline questionnaires, WISCOMP identified the following challenges. While these challenges were articulated in the context of the India-Pakistan Conflict Transformation Workshops, they also speak to issues that confront peace processes in the South Asian region.

5.1. Challenges and Lessons Learned

5.1.a. The Nation-State and the Realist Paradigm

The dominance of Realism in the state’s formulation of ‘peace’, ‘security’, and what it considers best for its citizens was seen as a primary challenge by the majority of the Indian and Pakistani participants. They not only articulated a need to engage with the nation-state on widening formulations of ‘peace’ and ‘security’, but to also address denials by governments that certain conflicts don’t exist. A bureaucrat from Peshawar described this challenge in the following words:

*Most people in government service have studied international relations and real politik. You can find them in abundance here. So, it is difficult to find...*
partners who understand the need for a conflict transformation approach. As an individual, I believe in this approach, but I live in a context where this is not the belief. Moreover, for a government bureaucrat to build relationships with the common man is difficult primarily because of the hierarchical set-up within which he works. Deeply entrenched hierarchies within government institutions are a challenge to conflict transformation work. Plus, the political context remains marred by fierce competition and one-upmanship.

However, this respondent also acknowledged that in light of the events that the ‘war on terror’ has unleashed, particularly in Pakistan, a Realist interpretation is increasingly less helpful and there is a need for a new security and foreign policy paradigm. The view that the nation-state is stifling people-to-people initiatives and movements from the grassroots found a strong articulation among the alumni, who pointed to the visa policy between the two countries as an example.

Participants from Kashmir and Manipur shared examples of the stark ways in which the nation-state transforms itself from protector to predator—when those vested with the power to prevent violence begin to violate the human rights of the civilians they are supposed to protect. Since the beginning of the 21st century, instances of the state committing acts of violence against its own people to quell discontent and dissent have been reported with alarming regularity and alacrity. Although violations by private/non-state actors are equally debilitating, the majority view was that those perpetrated by agents of the state are particularly worrying. For example, Indian participants noted that although their fellow citizens are empowered with a range of civil liberties, India holds the dubious distinction of a state that has committed human rights violations in regions often perceived as the periphery—distant from prosperous and ‘shining’ India. In this context, they advocated for the transformation of the nation-state into one that was more humane, inclusive, and people-oriented. Specific measures such as security sector reform and a greater focus on human security issues were proposed. The important role that popular struggles and popular discourses can play in this context was underscored.

However, it would be incorrect to assert that all the alumni shared this view. Some, although a minority, took exception to the criticism that had been bestowed on the Indian and Pakistani states. They felt that a more nuanced understanding of the role of the states was needed. For example, in the context of bilateral relations, while the two governments could certainly do much more, they had undertaken initiatives to increase people-to-people contact and exchanges on a large scale. For example, Workshop alumnus Tridivesh Singh Maini, a policy analyst currently associated with the Jindal School of International Affairs, Sonepat, pointed to the overwhelming
hospitality provided by the Pakistani state to Sikh pilgrims whenever they have expressed a desire to visit sites of religious significance (some of the most important of which happen to be in Pakistan). Maini noted that the facilitation of cross-border pilgrimages was done without a formal agreement between the two governments, and this must be applauded.

Diplomacy between India and Pakistan needs a strong dose of courage, spontaneity, and dynamism. It is imperative that the political leadership of both countries shows some boldness, and does not bank excessively on envoys and back channel diplomacy. It is time the political leadership seized the initiative and moved from platitudes to substance.

Tridivesh Singh Maini, Alumnus, 2007 Workshop Fellow, The Jindal School of International Affairs, Sonepat

5.1.b. The Robust Existence of Spoilers

The spoilers—those with a vested interest in the perpetuation of fear, hostility and violence—pose a daunting challenge to the peace process between India and Pakistan. An act of violence by them can cause widespread suffering and derail peace efforts for a long time. Participants recognized the power that the spoilers held and committed to not giving in to their agenda when a crisis occurred. In their definition of spoilers, they went beyond ‘militant’, ‘extremist’, and ‘terrorist’ groups to include sections of the state including some politicians, bureaucrats, and military officers in the two countries. As a Delhi-based activist put it,

The spoilers are the nuclear weapons complex, sections of the military and security establishment, and the aggressive nationalism of the political parties that have embraced the nuclear bomb.

Reference was also made to the international weapons’ manufacturing complexes in countries such as Sweden, Russia, and the USA, which have fuelled violence in the South Asian region. In fact, a security analyst from Islamabad stated that counter-terrorism operations (particularly in Kashmir and the Af-Pak region) have ‘created profit-generating mega complexes, far bigger than the military-industrial-bureaucratic complexes’. As a result, even those involved in combating militant/extremist violence now have a stake in the perpetuation of chaos and hostility.

The role played by the religious elite was also mentioned in this respect. For example, Kashif Saeed Khan, a peacebuilder from Peshawar currently pursuing a PhD in Environment and Development Studies at the National University of Life Sciences in As, Norway, narrated an incident from his childhood, which influenced his views
on the misuse of religion by some members of the clergy to serve their own interests to the detriment of the masses.

The maid who worked in our home had lost her son in the Kashmir conflict. She wept incessantly and cursed ‘the religious elite who incited the poor and disillusioned youth of Pakistan to fight jihad and end up in heaven while they sent their own children to USA/Europe for education.’ Her ordeal left a lasting impression on me, and led me to look more closely at the hypocrisy of the misguided clergy.91

Participants were equally disillusioned with the political class in their respective countries, holding politicians responsible for escalating the conflict, often at the cost of the wellbeing of the citizens who voted them to power. Asifa Hasan, an Islamabad-based researcher currently pursuing a PhD in Energy and Environmental Policy at the University of Delaware, USA, echoed the views of many of her Workshop colleagues when she stated that ‘politicians and political processes have increased poverty and the misery of the masses in the two countries’.

Reference was made to a ‘predatory political class’, which is dominated by autocratic political families and class elites who act with low levels of accountability and have amassed unimaginable amounts of wealth by treating state institutions as their own personal preserve. For instance, Nidhi Soni, Editor, Newslink Services, Delhi (and alumnus on the 2005 workshop) said:

In my opinion, peace between India and Pakistan can become a reality only when we stop blaming each other for the follies committed by our politicians, more so for their vested political and personal ambitions.

In recent years, there has been some engagement between the political classes from the two sides, which has showed results in terms of their hesitation to blame ‘the other’ country for an act of violence within their own borders. However, the overwhelming view at the Workshops was that the military (particularly in Pakistan) and the bureaucracy (particularly in India) were not fully on board the peace process. The hostility that exists within the bureaucracies and security establishments towards ‘the other’ has sometimes even resulted in a veto of decisions taken by the political leadership. For example, Beena Sarwar, Pakistan Editor of the Aman ki Asha initiative (and resource person at the 2004 WISCOMP Workshop titled Dialogic Engagement) makes reference to the first Pakistan India Social Media Mela held in July 2012 in

---

Karachi where despite the instructions of Rehman Malik, Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister on Interior, to issue two-month, non-police reporting, multiple-entry visas to the Indian delegates, the High Commission gave them 10-day, single entry, police reporting visas!92

Although the alumni remained alert to the acts of spoilers, there were times, particularly post-Mumbai 2008, when this commitment waivered for some of them. At such times, the power of spoilers to wreak havoc and undo years of peacebuilding work came out starkly. For example, Talha Fasih Khan (a participant of the 2003 Workshop titled Transcending Conflict) voiced the sentiment of many of his Workshop peers when he expressed skepticism owing to the overwhelming power of the spoilers, on both sides:

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 marginalized 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 people-to-people contact are encouraging. 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.

Participants concurred that the ‘biggest spoiler’ was the deep deficit of trust that exists between the two countries. Whether this was with respect to the mistrust within the trading community, which seeks to scuttle economic cooperation, or the political resistance to withdraw troops from the Siachen heights, or general public perceptions about ‘the other’, ignorance and prejudice coupled with a deep suspicion of those across the border have undermined genuine efforts for sustainable peace and security. Nicholas Wheeler, an International Relations scholar based at the University of Birmingham, UK, addressed this crucial but overlooked dimension of India-Pakistan relations at the 2007 Workshop titled Coexistence and Trust-Building: Transforming Relationships. He engaged with the drivers of mistrust to explore the challenges that

India and Pakistan face in the process of building trusting relationships. In this context, he proposed the cultivation of a ‘security dilemma sensibility’, which includes the ability to get into the counter fears of others, transcending security competition. However, in order to actualize this sensibility, Wheeler pointed to the existence of what Mikhail Gorbachev called the ‘human factor’ in the context of his trusting relationship with Ronald Reagan in the 1980s or what was also seen in the relationship between Prime Ministers Atal Behari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif in late-1998 and early-1999.

These are, as Wheeler puts it, ‘certain forms of interpersonal communicative dynamics (encompassing written, verbal, and face-to-face interactions)’ which encourage decision-makers to enter into a ‘space of trust’, thereby making possible new levels of cooperation. However, what followed at Kargil in the summer of 1999 is a reminder of the reality that ‘the ‘human factor’ depends crucially on the capacity of leaders to shield these initiatives from spoilers (domestic and external).

The view that peacebuilders too come with vested interests was also advanced. Participants who came with the experience of working in Afghanistan and Nepal pointed to the creation of a ‘conflict industry’, wherein peace and conflict work has become a lucrative proposition for a good number of INGOs and local civil society groups. The idea that peacebuilding is not necessarily a nonviolent exercise and can come with a variety of vested interests was also flagged. In this context, ‘nonviolence’ was proposed as a preferred framework to ‘peace’, because as Gandhian scholar (and Workshop resource person) Vinay Lal put it, ‘If you use nonviolence, peace will automatically follow. But the reverse may not be true.’
5.1.c. Breaching the Visa Wall

The most formidable challenge to the sustenance of the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation dialogues and the broader ‘public peace process’ has stemmed from the institutionalization of the conflict at many levels. A significant manifestation of this is the stringent visa regime.

Regular contact and sustained dialogue are the ‘oxygen’ of conflict transformation efforts. However, if such contact is rendered difficult by a visa policy that is consistent in its effort to block people-to-people initiatives, what do ordinary Indians and Pakistanis do?

In addition to a willful ‘no tourism’ policy between India and Pakistan, the exercise of securing a visa to travel to ‘the other’ country is marked with arduous paperwork (including the submission of documents that validate the antecedents and credibility of both the invitee and the host), hostile visa officials at the front desks, a two-to-three month wait for a response to the visa application, and finally, for a good number of applicants, a denial. Workshop participants employed with public sector universities or institutions confront another layer of challenges since they have to acquire an ‘internal no-objection’ clearance from their own governments. It is also not a rare occurrence when participants who overcome these hurdles are unable to cross the border because their passport (with the stamped visa) is delivered after the commencement of the Conflict Transformation Workshop (even though the visa application and passport were submitted two months prior to the event). The delay in delivering visas to those who do not live in Islamabad (where the Indian High Commission is located) means that the young Pakistani applicant has lost a rare opportunity—just like her parents and grandparents—to travel to the other side and to dialogue with her Indian peers.

On the eve of each Conflict Transformation Workshop, 20%–30% of the Pakistani participants have been unable to travel to Delhi due to one of the aforementioned reasons. For example, a few days before the commencement of WISCOMP’s 2012 Workshop, seven youth leaders of the 24-member Pakistani delegation gave up their pursuit of the Indian visa in exasperation.

93 Indians and Pakistanis cannot enter each other’s countries as ‘tourists’. The category of a visitor/tourist visa is conspicuous by its absence from the visa policy that the two countries follow towards each other.

94 The rigidity of the visa policy takes on a different meaning for thousands of first and second generation Indians and Pakistanis who have waited years to meet parents, siblings, cousins, and other relatives across the border.
Even those who make it to the Workshops share stories of cliff-hanger moments when travel ‘clearances’ came just hours prior to departure; of restrictions placed on them by the ‘single city’ visa, which prevented travel to even the suburbs of Delhi; and of the demeaning ‘police reporting’ procedure, which required the Pakistani delegates to report to a designated police station within 24-hours of arriving in Delhi. Indian participants who attempted to travel to Pakistan for similar dialogues have shared identical stories, lucidly reflecting the tit-for-tat policy that the two bureaucracies follow towards each other. Yet, at the end of it all, Indians and Pakistanis spoke in unison when they said that the exhilarating experience of ‘meeting the other’ transcended all these challenges.

While the visa policy is a manifestation of the political conflict, its impact on efforts to promote people-to-people contact has been devastating. This, despite the awareness among political leaders that spoilers do not seek visas to exacerbate the conflict! As Rubina Jabbar, a Karachi-based journalist who attended the 2005 Workshop put it:

*Senior citizens wishing to make that once-in-a-lifetime trip to visit separated family members have nothing to do with terrorism. Neither do terrorists have anything to do with police reporting visas.*

Even though some headway has been made in recent years to ease travel restrictions, it takes only one act of violence for new hurdles to be set in place. The most recent example of this is the September 2012 visa liberalization agreement which was signed between the Foreign Ministers of the two countries to ‘ensure that people remain at the heart of the bilateral relationship’. Representing the first major overhaul since 1974, the agreement eased travel restrictions for business-persons, introduced a new
category of group tourism, and declared that senior citizens (above 65 years) were eligible for a visa-on-arrival, among other concessions. However, many of these measures were withdrawn in early-2013 following heightened tension along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir (in the wake of the killing of Indian soldiers). This proved, once again, that contact between ordinary people remains hostage to the actions of extremists, spoilers, and governments, on both sides.

All peacebuilding efforts suffer when this happens; not to mention the greater need for dialogue when conflict escalates. For example, WISCOMP was unable to hold a cross-border dialogue in 2002 owing to the hostility generated by the attack on the Indian Parliament for which New Delhi blamed Islamabad. All travel links were suspended between the two countries and India launched a massive military mobilization on its border with Pakistan. In 2003, Pakistani participants had to travel to India via Dubai (at double the cost, borne by WISCOMP) owing to the continuing suspension of travel links.

To cite another instance, although WISCOMP received the necessary ‘security’ and ‘political’ clearances to hold all 10 of its Annual Conflict Transformation Workshops in New Delhi, its attempt to organize an Alumni Convention in Lahore in 2007 proved unsuccessful, owing to the denial of visas. Maria Gulraize Khan, a Strategic Planning Specialist with the Education Development Center, Lahore, alumnus of two WISCOMP dialogues, and coordinator of this ill-fated meeting, shared the following sentiment after working tirelessly for months to make this cross-border alumni dialogue a reality:

*I pray that the WISCOMP network continues to grow, and that one day nobody has to go insane while trying to visit friends across the border.*

These experiences are not unique to the WISCOMP Workshops, but represent the angst of many individual travelers and civil society organizations who attempt to cross the border to build peace. There was consensus among the Indian and Pakistani participants about the formidable challenge that such a visa policy presents—particularly to efforts that seek to widen the dialogue process and build cross-border institutional linkages between the two countries. Not only does the policy go against the very strong constituency of people (in both countries) who have a curiosity and desire to meet ‘the other’, it also exacerbates the trust deficit and intensifies the hostility that already surrounds contentious issues such as Kashmir, Siachen, and water sharing. In the absence of face-to-face contact, citizens of the two countries are left with no choice but to form their understanding of each other on hearsay, stereotypes, long-held one-sided enemy perceptions, media coverage, and populist politics.
In this context, it is worth repeating here that WISCOMP was able to overcome stringent visa procedures and bureaucratic hurdles to keep the cross-border dialogues alive (even during times of political conflict).

5.2. Proposals for the Way Forward

Although the call for action was a natural corollary to the sustained dialogue process initiated by the Workshops, WISCOMP has been careful to ensure that this action comes from within the alumni network and not ignited from the outside. Listed here are those recommendations, which received the vote of at least 70% of the Workshop alumni.

5.2.a. The Internet: A Game Changer?

Although the bilateral visa policy presents a daunting challenge to cross-border peacebuilding initiatives, the key question here is this: What can ordinary Indians and Pakistanis (and the institutions they represent) do about this? How do they transcend this challenge and sustain the work of building peace? Some have overcome this challenge by shifting the meetings to cities in third countries such as Dubai, Kathmandu, and Bangkok. But what do those with fewer financial resources at their disposal do? How do they sustain the conversations on a weekly, monthly, and yearly basis?

Online social media have emerged as a powerful resource in this context. Although there remains no substitute for face-to-face dialogue, the internet has stepped in to provide a much-needed ‘virtual’ space for cross-border conversations to continue, uninterrupted. The momentum and enthusiasm initiated at the Conflict Transformation Workshops has been sustained and even taken to the next level, courtesy social media such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, and emails. Many alumni have also started their own blogs and have sustained an energetic dialogue through this medium. These online forums have helped the alumni to not only sustain and moderate the dialogue initiated at the Workshops, but to also carry it forward in the form of new projects and collaborations. For example, social media tools have been used by the alumni to concretize professional partnerships, exchange teaching and training materials, and widen the circles of engagement on issues of peace and security. So, when a fresh concoction of tensions is stirred up, a good number of alumni have turned to online tools such as Skype to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict and to keep the channels of communication open. Internet technology has, thus, transcended the ‘iron curtain’ between India and Pakistan in significant ways.

With each passing year, participants—Indian and Pakistani alike—have expressed their growing conviction that such dialogues and broader people-to-people initiatives have
set into place a process that is not only vital but also irreversible. To paraphrase French writer Victor Hugo, ‘If there is one thing that is stronger than governments, it is an idea whose time has come’. This could not be more apt for the efforts of people’s movements in the two countries to increase cross-border travel, dialogue, and trade. In fact, a study of the ebbs and flows of the peace process between 2001 and 2012 demonstrates that while governments can increase visa hurdles or pause the flow of cross-border travel, these can only be temporary. Such policies cannot take on a permanent nature of the kind they did in the years between the 1960s and 1990s. Although there are several reasons for this, a significant factor is the presence of one medium—the internet—which has revolutionized the way that Indians and Pakistanis perceive each other. The internet has opened up a world of possibilities for Indians and Pakistanis to engage with each other’s worldviews and interpretations of events.

Such conversations were not possible till about a decade ago. In fact, till the year 2000, travelers using the land route through Attari-Wagah were not allowed to carry newspapers from ‘the other’ country. Today, scores of Indians and Pakistanis read each other’s newspapers online and share their own views on current issues. Even after the Workshop dialogues, participants continue to read each other’s blogs and online newspapers, share videos on YouTube (many of which, interestingly, are stories of coexistence), share jokes on Twitter, and most significantly, talk with one another when a crisis erupts. Internet connectivity has thus played a vital role in ensuring that Indians and Pakistanis talk to one another, in peace-time as well as during a crisis. WISCOMP has also observed that through social media, Indians and Pakistanis who have not attended the Workshops but who are within the ‘circles of influence’ of the alumni have also become part of this larger group of young peacebuilders. According to Peace.Facebook.com—a site that tracks Facebook interactions in conflict zones—India-Pakistan friendships and interactions increased from ‘64,000 a day on 12 February 2011 to 2.6 lakhs a day on 30 July 2011’. Data from the same website on daily Facebook interactions between Greece-Turkey, Israel-Palestine, and Albania-Serbia are outnumbered by those between Indians and Pakistanis. Of the 400 WISCOMP alumni, 220 are connected to one another via Facebook.

While figures for Twitter are not available, Shivam Vij, an independent journalist based in Delhi and a keen observer of such online interactions, believes that India-

---

95 In recent years, WISCOMP has received suggestions to create a blog linked to its website, which could serve as a platform for the alumni to continue their interaction and share their writings on peacebuilding between India and Pakistan. This way, the alumni network would remain connected and integrated.

Pakistan interactions on this website are worth a mention:

*Twitter lets Indians and Pakistanis in on to the internal conversations of the people of the other country, and thus helps us understand each other better.*

The most significant consequence of this internet revolution is that youngsters now have an alternative medium, a new source through which to access information about ‘the other’. They do not have to depend on governments to ‘meet’ one another. As Vij notes:

*It is a silent revolution in knowing the other. A smooth debate from one newspaper op-ed to another, carried on to-and-fro across the Radcliffe Line through undersea internet cables. Who needs a track two conference? Netistan isn’t just some candlelight peacenik love-fest. In fact, jingoists are more obsessed with ‘the other’ than anyone else. You see them flaming the comments’ sections of blog posts…This is where the real Indo-Pak dialogue happens.*

Although examples of the ways in which young Indians and Pakistanis are using the internet to bring about deep-rooted social change are increasing by the day, it would be incorrect to suggest that public opinion in the two countries is completely for peace. Rather, this is to make the point that social media and online journalism can revolutionize the way Indians and Pakistanis ‘see’ each other, thereby playing an important role in bridging the divides.

### 5.2.b. People-to-People Contact: ‘An Idea Whose Time Has Come’

Participants spoke in unison with respect to support for increasing people-to-people contact between the two countries. They felt that only through such contact would Indians and Pakistanis change their ‘enemy images’ of one another.

---

97 Ibid.

98 For example, according to the Pew Global Attitudes Survey (conducted by the Washington DC-based Pew Research Center), 75% Pakistanis and 65% Indians see each other’s countries in a ‘bad light’.

99 Although French writer Victor Hugo penned this popular statement in a different social and political context, it bears relevance to the conflict transformation efforts between India and Pakistan, particularly at this juncture of the peace process.
The case for strengthening cross-border dialogues, cultural and sporting ties, trade, and tourism stems not merely from the oft-quoted statement that ‘we cannot choose our neighbors’ or that it makes for a good peacebuilding strategy. Rather, there is a stronger, deeper connect, which Kamran Rehmat, Editor, Pique Magazine, Islamabad, so eloquently describes:

_The Indian lyricist Javed Akhtar suggests in a song from the movie Refugee that ‘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._

Perhaps only this can explain why despite the suspension of air and land links in 2002–03, Indians and Pakistanis were travelling to each other’s countries, albeit via Dubai. The desire to meet was as strong as ever, with development workers, peace activists, educators, journalists, and even politicians using this long circuitous route to travel to ‘the other’ country. The difficulty imposed by the suspension of flights did not hinder the popular desire to travel to ‘the other’ country and interact with its people. In fact, by refusing to be dependent on the whims of their governments, Indians and Pakistanis made a powerful statement that the suspension of communication (at the political level) was a short-sighted decision and that this would not deter them from sustaining cross-border relationships.

5.2.c. Journeys to the other side: Workshop venues should alternate between India and Pakistan

The need to hold the Conflict Transformation Workshops in Pakistan so that the Indian participants could also experience Pakistani culture and lifestyle was a unanimous recommendation. Participants from Pakistan testified to the fact that conflict transformation processes deepen when individuals travel to the so-called ‘enemy’ country and experience first-hand the lived reality on the other side. They shared that in addition to the learnings from the Conflict Transformation Workshops, the trip to New Delhi enabled them to enter the geographical, personal, and social contexts within which ‘the other’ lived. This was a powerful experience, which also impacted the conversations inside the Workshop room.

This experience was validated by some Indian participants who _did_ have the opportunity to travel to Pakistan. In fact, their learning curve was far greater than those who had interacted with Pakistanis only in Delhi. The organization of the

---

100 For example, Siddhartha Dave, Director (Strategic Partnership), Milestone Communications, New Delhi (and alumnus of the 2004 Workshop) secured a visa for Lahore to watch the final match of the One Day International Cricket Series between India and Pakistan in March 2004 (in which the former lifted the trophy). The visit, which took place on the eve of his participation in the Conflict
Workshops in Pakistan would also enable a larger number of young Pakistanis to meet with their Indian counterparts, just the way a wider cross-section of Indians were able to interact with the Pakistani participants when the dialogues were held in Delhi.

An important lesson from the experiences of those participants (who were also able to travel to ‘the other’ country) was that the meeting venue should alternate between the two countries and this should be sustained. A one-off workshop or exchange program will do little to bring about deep-rooted change. The engagement on political, social, and economic issues needs to be consistent, even as participants continue to build trust, one step-at-a-time. It is only through such a process that prejudice reduction will transform into a long-lasting humanization of ‘the other’.

The sustenance of this process requires cross-border institutional linkages between WISCOMP (in New Delhi) and organizations based in Pakistan. Several Pakistani alumni have offered to initiate such partnerships between WISCOMP and the institutions they represent (which include conflict resolution departments at universities in Islamabad and Lahore, think-tanks, grassroots organizations, and media companies, among others). The establishment of a WISCOMP Chapter in Pakistan (run by a group of alumni) was also proposed as a strategy to facilitate the organization of Conflict Transformation Workshops in Pakistani cities such as Islamabad and Lahore.

5.2.d. Increase the scale of cross-border professional partnerships

The landscape for cross-border collaborations between Indians and Pakistanis is vast. Participants pointed to the shared problems of poverty, malnutrition, gender inequality, illiteracy, and the poor state of human development in both countries, which could be overcome if Indians and Pakistanis pooled in their resources and expertise. Alumni partnerships that addressed issues of human development and governance, as well as common challenges such as corruption, the politicization of religion, and growth of extremism, were proposed as an alternative to ‘old-school thinking’ which encouraged transformation Workshop, increased his takeaway from this dialogue. Sharing a transformative moment from this trip to Pakistan, Siddhartha wrote: ‘To celebrate the Indian team’s victory in Pakistan, the students of the National College of Arts, Lahore treated me. Since I am a vegetarian, they served me chhole puris, whose taste was the same as home. The rasmalai and gulab jamuns were just as sweet as those served in India, contrary to what we are indoctrinated to think. That night, I drove through the streets of Lahore with my Pakistani friends, the Indian tricolor fluttering atop the car. At that moment, this Islamic country appeared to be more tolerant and egalitarian than my own “secular”, “democratic” one... Never before in my life was I so at ease. And I least expected to feel so in Pakistan!’
competition to increase the arsenal of weapons to deter the ostensibly offensive intentions of ‘the other’. As Kashif Saeed Khan, a peacebuilder from Peshawar (and 2005 Workshop alumnus), put it:

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 military capabilities when their own people live in absolute poverty, hunger, and disease.

In addition to human development issues (on which the two countries share a similar scorecard), the other potential areas of cross-border collaboration that participants identified included: scientific research (including medicine); promotion of the arts, trade, and tourism; a common history textbook coauthored by Indians and Pakistanis which could be used by educational institutions in the two countries; co-scripting and co-directing a film on conflict transformation; localized peacebuilding workshops co-facilitated by an Indian and a Pakistani alumni; an online discussion group/blog and interactive website where alumni could have ‘live’ debates on a wide range of issues and also engage with new research from the field of conflict transformation; and cross-border research on partitioned regions (such as Punjab and Bengal) and the potential of psychosocial interventions as a peacebuilding method to bridge the divides between partitioned peoples. The creation of supporting institutional mechanisms and linkages through which young Indian and Pakistani professionals could work together on a sustained basis was underscored in this context.

5.2.e. The establishment of a regional peacebuilding institute

The conversion of the Conflict Transformation Workshops into a South Asian regional peacebuilding institute (with local offices in all countries of the region) was proposed. The curriculum of such an institute—reflecting a closer linkage between theory, practice, and research—could be developed to offer a certificate or diploma course. This would provide a much-needed context for young South Asians to not only engage with each other’s worldviews, but to also acquire hands-on skills in nonviolent communication and action, structured dialogue, negotiation, active listening et al. These skills would be helpful in any setting, whether within the home, in the workplace, or at a broader societal level. Such an institute would also respond to the participants’ need to build capacity to respond to the internal security situation in their respective countries. Embedded in this recommendation was the view that before they build peace with their neighbors, youth leaders should address the intolerance and violence in their own communities and societies. By transforming into a full-fledged training institute, spanning a longer duration, the Workshops would also be able to take on board, in a more holistic way, the local (and often complex) contexts within which
the alumni lived and worked. For example, a government officer from Peshawar wanted the WISCOMP Workshops to address the challenges he confronts owing to the complex relationship between poverty and radicalization in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:

> When you talk about democracy and peace, people respond that they don’t have anything to eat. You can think of talking about these intellectual things only once you are well-fed, you are medicated, you have a good sanitation system etc. So if people don’t have these basic physical needs available to them, how can they talk about these intellectual things?

**5.2.f. A deeper engagement with track one, particularly the security sector**

In order to enhance the impact on broader processes of social change, participants proposed that WISCOMP should hold similar dialogues for young Indians and Pakistanis representing track one sectors such as foreign policy, diplomacy, public administration, politics, the armed forces, and other areas of the security sector. Although there has been some engagement between Indian and Pakistani politicians in recent years, contact between the armed forces and bureaucrats remains limited. The absence of face-to-face contact is, in fact, the result of a deliberate, systematic policy of the two governments to prevent communication because it is only in such an environment that narratives which build ‘enemy images’ can flourish. A stark example of this was the visit of an Indian journalist (Anita Joshua of *The Hindu*) to the Gayari sector of Siachen as part of a small entourage led by Pakistan Army Chief Gen. Ashraf Parvez Kayani in the wake of the tragic snow-slide in April 2012, which killed 140 Pakistani soldiers. Although the decision of the Army Chief to include an Indian in his visit to Siachen drew much attention, what generated greater discussion was the revelation of the Pakistani soldiers stationed in Siachen that this was their first face-to-face meeting with an Indian.

The Indian and Pakistani participants spoke in unison of the need for structured and sustained dialogue between the young members of the armed forces and the bureaucracies in the two countries. It was suggested that such dialogues could be preceded by in-country workshops that focus on ‘vertical’ relationship-building between track one actors (politicians, army officers, and bureaucrats) and those working in the non-governmental tracks (such as development, human rights, media, education, and academia) on one side, followed by ‘horizontal’ inter-country workshops between specific groups, for instance between bureaucrats from the two

---

101 Although Workshop resource persons/trainers have represented the highest echelons of politics, diplomacy, and the security sector, fewer participants have come from these disciplines. This lacuna needs to be addressed because some of the most deeply entrenched enemy images exist among those located in the armed forces and the bureaucracies.
countries. While the Conflict Transformation Workshops made great strides in building horizontal capacity, for instance between educators, grassroots practitioners, and researchers across the conflict divide, they were perhaps less successful in building vertical capacity through which diplomats, military officers, civil society practitioners, and politicians could build strategic relationships and institutional partnerships. In this context, Ambar Ahmad, a Delhi-based college teacher, echoing the views of her peers at the 2001 Workshop titled *Rehumanizing The Other*, shared that a significant learning was ‘the need to talk not just to the *already converted* but to forge linkages between policymakers and civil society within each country.’ The emphasis on both vertical and horizontal relationship-building was therefore an important recommendation.

5.2.g. *Trainings in conflict-sensitive journalism*

Customized workshops for journalists in the two countries were also proposed. The media (whether newspapers, television news channels, or the entertainment industry) has often been criticized for inflaming passions and promoting a jingoistic nationalism, which denigrates ‘the other’. In this context, there was an overwhelming demand for specific trainings in ‘peace journalism’ or ‘conflict-sensitive journalism’. While this would directly benefit the Indian and Pakistani journalists who attended the Workshops, it would also sensitize participants from other professions to look at news stories on the bilateral conflict through a more nuanced lens. Nirupama

---

102 John Paul Lederach defines vertical capacity-building as the ability to develop relationships of respect/understanding between higher levels of leadership and those representing mid-range, community, and grassroots levels of peacebuilding in a society. Horizontal capacity-building refers to efforts to work with counterparts across the lines of division, for instance between women’s groups or educators on either side of the conflict divide. John Paul Lederach, ‘The Challenge of the 21st Century: Justpeace’, *People Building Peace: 35 Inspiring Stories from Around the World* (Utrecht: European Center for Conflict Prevention, 1999).
Subramanian, *The Hindu’s* former Islamabad correspondent, also points to the need for journalists to be allowed to travel freely in ‘the other’ country:

*For coverage that is non-episodic and can put itself in the shoes of the subject, there is no alternative to more capable, professional journalists on the ground with full freedom to travel within ‘the other’ country. While this will not turn the two countries into best friends overnight, it might just promote a slightly better understanding of the other side than there is at present.*

---

5.2.h. Education for peace

There was a common acceptance of the need to begin early—in schools, even kindergarten—if Indians and Pakistanis are to transcend the myriad dividers. Mohandas Gandhi’s words, ‘If we are to teach real peace in the world, we have to begin with the children’ could not be more apt for the challenges that India and Pakistan face today. For instance, an educator from Jammu urged WISCOMP to initiate a dialogue program for 13–17 year olds from different parts of Jammu and Kashmir because it is at this age that prejudices deepen. She shared a story from her classroom setting wherein Hindu teenagers (in Jammu) did not understand the meaning

---

attached to the Eid holiday and neither did they express a desire to learn about this festival. Interventions for teenagers from Jammu and Kashmir, plus dialogues with peers from other parts of India and Pakistan were thus strongly recommended.

In response to many such suggestions, in 2012, WISCOMP envisioned the *Hum Kadam Education for Peace Program*, which targets school students, school teachers, and teacher educators. The Program seeks to sensitize students and teachers to the importance of respecting diversity (of beliefs, cultures, and lifestyles) as well as building their capacity to use non-judgmental, dialogic methods of conflict resolution. Institutional linkages between schools across fault-lines have been included in the Program as an important goal with a view to facilitate long-term processes that emphasize the ethos and practice of conflict transformation and multiculturalism within K–12 educational spaces. Although the pilot activities were initiated in two geographical areas—New Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir—WISCOMP plans to expand the project to include schools in other parts of India, Pakistan, and South Asia, particularly in regions where mistrust and alienation between various segments of the population have rigidified due to long-drawn ethno-nationalist movements and other forms of religious/cultural conflicts.

### 5.2.i. Advocacy trainings

An important recommendation was with reference to the inclusion of advocacy modules in the Workshop curriculum. This would help participants to return to their constituencies with the expertise to engage in advocacy on specific issues, such as the demand for the release of fishermen languishing in ‘the other’ country’s jails; removal of the ‘single-city’, ‘police-reporting’ visa policy, which has failed in its goal to deter extremist violence; the need to open consulates in other cities; et al. Training in advocacy would also enable young people to launch their own campaigns for bringing much needed political attention to these issues.

### 5.2.j. Cross-cultural knowledge network

Workshop alumni envisaged a ‘knowledge network’ that connected third generation South Asians working in the field of peacebuilding. This could also serve as an anchor and a professional support group through which the alumni could participate in a cross-fertilization of ideas, share lessons learned, exchange similar project documents, et al.

### 5.2.k. Practices to sustain personal change

Based on the profound personal change that several participants experienced, there was the suggestion that future dialogues should focus more on practices such as
critical thinking, meditation, compassionate listening, and trauma healing. Anuradha Choudry, a Research Associate at the Center for Indian Psychology, Jain University, Bangalore, one of the many alumni who felt strongly about this, said:

*I am convinced that the roots of most social ills lie in us intrinsically, and not in systems...I believe it is an individual who sets the pace for change at all other levels... Based on the personal change many of us experienced at the Workshops, I am very confident that our friendships will always be a part of my life and my prayers wherever I go. WISCOMP provided the ideal atmosphere and support to create those magical moments that bring together complete strangers, even enemies, and bind them in a chain of goodwill.*
Concluding Reflections

Concluding Reflections

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. The joy and excitement of this journey is incomparable and unique. It is made even richer by the growing number 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...In some ways, the wheel has come full circle—in the many young Pakistani participants who tell us about their decision to make peacebuilding a part of their personal journey of discovery and growth. Each time WISCOMP is asked to be a referee for a young Pakistani applicant for a placement, at a university or a corporation in various parts of the globe, we are filled with gratitude for the trust that is thus bequeathed...It is both humbling and uplifting in a curious kind of way to experience, again and again, the space where a dream was at work and a vision unfolded.104

In the year 2000, when the contours of this dream were penned into a proposal for a ‘peace camp’ for college students from India and Pakistan, WISCOMP was conscious of the dominant public opinion in both countries— influenced by the nuclear tests (1998) and the Kargil conflict (1999)—which had little hope in the ability of dialogue (let alone a conflict transformation approach) to bridge the myriad divides. WISCOMP drew strength from its intuitive belief in the power of dialogue and in the innate capacity of human beings to build empathy, even when the divisions ran deep. This vision was also based on the coauthor Meenakshi Gopinath’s experiences as a participant in various track two and multi-track dialogues, such as the Neemrana initiative and the Pakistan India People’s Forum for Peace and Democracy. Out of these experiences emerged some tentative theories of change, which formed the bedrock of the Conflict Transformation Workshops. The central theory was that sustained face-to-face dialogue along with professional training in peacebuilding can help stakeholders to build cross-border strategic relationships, which in turn can impact processes of constructive social change. Integral to this theory were pedagogies which emphasized experiential and elicitive approaches to learning as well as the need to build capacity for the practice of skills such as active listening, dialogue, and critical thinking.

In the backdrop of the intense hostility and mutual suspicion that surrounded bilateral relations at the beginning of the 21st century, it was not surprising that acquisition of the necessary ‘buy-in’ for this bold and unique vision was arduous. At the time, there were few takers—funders included—for a ‘conflict transformation’ approach that had not been tested and for which there was no empirical basis in South Asia. A window of hope opened when the Embassy of Finland in New Delhi invested faith in WISCOMP’s theory of change and decided to support the Conflict Transformation Workshops. Gradually, this support, which has been extremely facilitative, was extended to cover a period of 10 years, thus giving WISCOMP sufficient time to measure change at different levels.

Over the years, efforts to track and measure this ‘change’ benefitted from the burgeoning literature on peacebuilding evaluation, which emerged in the mid-2000s. Benchmarks were set to identify shifts in attitudes and perceptions as well as new forms of behavior that increased the possibility for coexistence. While these have been discussed in various chapters of this study, what we wish to foreground in this concluding note are the surprises—outcomes that WISCOMP had not envisaged at the initiation of the Workshops, but which, during the course of the dialogues, emerged as an important dimension of the conflict transformation process.

For example, an endline analysis of the alumni’s comments that accompanied their ranking of the various causes of the bilateral conflict revealed that they were now hesitant to vociferously articulate one primary cause, whether this was the Kashmir issue, religious difference, or political ideology. Avoiding certitudes and acknowledging the role of multiple factors, they pointed to the overarching influence of the deep deficit of trust that cuts across all sectors in the two countries. There was a more comprehensive understanding of the various issues that have sustained the conflict and a sensibility that these are layered by deep levels of mistrust.

In this context, an important learning from the Workshops was that the ground reality on the other side is complex and messy. Generalizations, particularly about ‘the other’, were therefore difficult. In fact, many alumni stated in the endline survey that it was ‘now impossible to make generalizations’ that showed ‘the other’ in poor light. They steered clear of survey options that asked them to ‘strongly agree’ or ‘strongly disagree’

---

105 John Paul Lederach had tested theories surrounding his formulation of conflict transformation in the 1990s in diverse regions of conflict such as Central America, West Africa, and Northern Ireland. However, at the dawn of the 21st century, the India-Pakistan relationship was stuck in Realist paradigms and conventional notions of ‘traditional security’. In such a context, conflict transformation represented a radically new way of looking at the bilateral conflict—its causes, the ebb and flow of the relational patterns, and proposals for its resolution and ‘transformation’. Conflict transformation invited stakeholders to step out of their comfort zones and imagine a new way of being in which difference and conflict were not feared; yet diversity and coexistence were celebrated.
with statements about the causes of the conflict or how they perceived ‘the other’.

However, they spoke with clarity and in unison on the way forward—that greater people-to-people contact, more civil society initiatives, and sustained dialogue between various tracks of peacebuilding would help to build trust and common ground on issues over which there were vast differences. Having now been participants to a multi-track dialogue process, they spoke with greater conviction on its ability to play a vital role in peacebuilding.

The alumni were also able to move from an intellectual articulation of peace and reconciliation to the internalization of these concepts. The Workshop sessions on individual-level transformation, which focused on the cultivation of empathy, proved to be extremely powerful and received consistently high ratings each year. From these sessions, participants gained a strong sense of the possible—that with transformational leadership and a strong desire for change, people can come together from different sides of a conflict, engage in honest dialogue, and move to a new space of trust and shared understanding.

In this context, the importance of a structured dialogue conducted by deft facilitators cannot be emphasized enough. The experience of the Conflict Transformation Workshops has proved that when individuals from across the divisions of conflict participate in such a process, they demonstrate their capacity to listen deeply to ‘the other’ side and often even surprise themselves at the level of empathy they are able to build for the adversary. There was also the recognition that there are no villains and victims—the pain of loss and the suffering generated by violence have no boundaries. They have touched the lives of Pakistaniis and Indians, Kashmiris and non-Kashmiris

---

106 Let us, for example, look at the baseline and endline views of the participants on the dispute over the Indus river waters. Participants were asked if they strongly agreed or disagreed with, or were unsure about, the statement that ‘the reason for the conflict between India and Pakistan was the bilateral dispute over the Indus river waters’. The baseline study showed high percentages for the categories ‘strong agreement’ (from the Pakistani respondents) and ‘strong disagreement’ (from the Indian respondents). However, in the endline questionnaires, participants overwhelmingly chose one of the following three options: neutral, mild agreement, or mild disagreement. While 65% of the Pakistani respondents were ‘neutral’ saying that this issue had to be taken into consideration along with other dividers, 63% of the Indians shared this view. Similarly, when asked about their views on whether ‘the reason for the conflict between the two countries is religious difference’, the majority of the participants (Indians and Pakistaniis) shifted to the ‘neutral/unsure’ category in the post-Workshop surveys. The percentage of Pakistani respondents who ‘strongly agreed’ with this statement fell from 20% (baseline) to 11% (endline) and there was a correspondending increase in the percentage of those were ‘unsure’ about religious difference as a source of conflict (46% in baseline to 55.5% in endline). Likewise, the percentage of Indian respondents who ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement fell from 18.5% to 13% and those were ‘unsure’ increased from 32.5% (baseline) to 48.5% (endline). Thus, both sides showed a greater tendency to refrain from speaking with certitude, while recognizing the complex and intertwined nature of the various bilateral conflicts.
alike. At the Workshops, the WISCOMP team often noticed a glimmer of hope when such sensitivity created a space in which participants talked about the need for ‘give-and-take’, ‘concessions to the other side’, ‘moving beyond proposals where one side loses’, and, most significantly, identifying those needs and aspirations that were common to all stakeholders.

These processes, in turn, facilitated important shifts in consciousness. For instance, many alumni experienced positive changes in their own understanding of who they were, reflected in their construction of identities that were more inclusive, cross-cutting, harmonizing, and context-driven. Second, they talked about experiencing sadness when they heard of violence and suffering on ‘the other side’ of the ‘border’. Third, they have remained resilient in their motivation to build cultures of coexistence at different levels of societal engagement. Fourth, they have acknowledged that while disagreements will continue, what matters is that the dialogue should be sustained and that an earnest search for common ground should continue. It was also reassuring to see the emergence of a strong sense of camaraderie, a feeling that they belonged to a community of peacebuilders.

Holding together this hope and energy was a consciousness among an overwhelming majority of the alumni that the onus to begin a new chapter in the history of India and Pakistan depended on the actions that they, as the third and fourth generations, would take in the years to come. Having access to new methods of communication (spawned by advances in information technology) and hence diverse narratives, they saw themselves as uniquely positioned to search for creative and mutually inclusive solutions. Reference was also made to the common aspirations and dreams for a prosperous and peaceful future which they shared, by virtue of the fact that they fell within a certain age bracket.

These young leaders have taken a courageous step by choosing to traverse the road to reconciliation between India and Pakistan. No doubt, they will encounter obstacles that may seem insurmountable. There will be moments when efforts at reconciliation will be submerged by violence and rage. New stalemates will emerge which will threaten to reverse the peace process. What alone will help them to stay the course are the ‘strategic relationships’ built with those across the border, the joint recognition of their interdependent futures, and the collective vision for a future that is peaceful, prosperous, and beyond boundaries.

We finally understood what our favourite musical icon meant when he sang Imagine. The Conflict Transformation Workshop indeed helped us to 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.

Anisha Kinra & Seema Sridhar
Peace and Security Researchers
(Alumni, 2005 Workshop)
Annexures

Participants at the Sixth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop titled Coexistence and Trust-building (held in 2007).

Ambassador M.K. Rasgotra (Former Indian Foreign Secretary, New Delhi) and Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Shankar Prasad (Defense Expert, New Delhi) at a Workshop session titled Sustaining the Composite Dialogue.

Dr. Jane Schukoske (Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Rural Research and Development, Gurgaon, and former Director of the United States Educational Foundation in India) with Workshop participants, Mr. Ashok Xavier (Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Work, Loyola College, Chennai), Ms. Nidhi Soni (Editor, Newslink Services, Delhi), and Mr. Raouf Rasool (Editor of the English daily Kashmir Images, Srinagar).

Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath (Hon. Director, WISCOMP) with plenary speaker Prof. Kevin Clements (Director, National Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand) at the opening session of the Fourth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop in 2005.
186 Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding for a New Generation
Annexure 1
Appendices to Theories of Change

This section includes data on WISCOMP’s theories of change, which was collected through the baseline and endline questionnaires administered among the participants of the Conflict Transformation Workshops. It is shared here with a purpose to corroborate the findings and learnings that emerged from the other research methods used in this study. The data is with respect to the following themes: the role of a structured dialogue process in transforming enemy perceptions of ‘the other’ and replacing these with more humane and realistic images; and the use of multi-track diplomacy and capacity-building in conflict transformation as successful methods for peacebuilding.

Figure 1a: Sources of Information about ‘The Other’:
Baseline Responses of Indian and Pakistani Participants

- Experience of interacting with them
- Popular media
- Attitudes of religious leaders
- Common gossip
- Community perceptions
- Historical reasons
Figure 1b: Sources of Information that Increase Understanding and Humanize ‘The Other’: Endline Responses of Indian and Pakistani Participants

Figure 1c: The Importance Accorded to Different Strategies of Peacebuilding: Endline Responses of Indian & Pakistani Participants
Figure 1d: The Significance of Multi-track Diplomacy as a Strategy for Building Sustainable Peace between India and Pakistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strong Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improvements in bilateral relations will be the result of greater people-to-people contact.</td>
<td>Endline P: 81%  I: 97.5%  Baseline P: 72%  I: 82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements in relations between Pakistan and India will be the result of the efforts of civil society groups.</td>
<td>Endline P: 87.5%  I: 77%  Baseline P: 73%  I: 65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements in bilateral relations will be the result of more talks between the political leaders and policymakers of the two countries.</td>
<td>Endline P: 98.5%  I: 75%  Baseline P: 78.3%  I: 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements in bilateral relations will be the result of increased trade and business between the two countries.</td>
<td>Endline P: 85.4%  I: 70%  Baseline P: 77%  I: 65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  
P: Pakistani  I: Indian

Praise for the Conflict Transformation Workshops

WISCOMP has made a significant contribution to creating a sustained space for the transformation of the thought-processes of the young generation in the South Asian region. My experiences as a university teacher longstanding and also a participant in various peace organizations over the years, gives me the impression that perhaps no other organization in South Asia would have done this much to bring about a fundamental transformation of the thought-processes of the decision-makers of tomorrow, as WISCOMP has done over the last ten years.

Prof. Satish Kumar, Track Two Diplomacy Scholar, and Director, Foundation for National Security Research, New Delhi

My basic conviction was reaffirmed at this Workshop. If you have a good process design, then you actually achieve an outcome. I think what we saw here was a microcosm of what we are all hoping for—that we can deal with difference constructively, we can live with difference.

Tahir Aziz, India, Pakistan, and Kashmir Program Director  Conciliation Resources, London

---

107 A sizeable minority of Kashmiri participants also expressed ‘strong disagreement’ with this statement. While 12.5% had ‘strongly disagreed’ in the baseline, 20.7% felt this way in the endline. Overall, they had less faith in the political leadership.

108 While there was popular support for economic cooperation as an important ‘track’ of peacebuilding, participants did acknowledge that beyond a point, it is difficult to delink trade from the political conflict. And when the political conflict escalates, it does damage progress on the economic front. Over 20% of the Kashmiri participants also expressed ‘strong disagreement’ with this statement in the endline. During the Workshop dialogues, many had expressed the fear that the discourse on cross-LoC trade would supersede the political dimension of the conflict.
**Figure 1e: Changing Metaphors for ‘The Other’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pakistani Responses: Baseline</th>
<th>Pakistani Responses: Endline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India has never reconciled to the creation of Pakistan and therefore wishes to destroy it...India is a right-wing Hindu state. It represents a mismanaged relationship.</td>
<td>India is our neighbor and we should peacefully coexist with it... A country with strong democratic traditions and freedom of speech... A misunderstood neighbor, a society to be discovered. A place my ancestors belonged to... the heart of their childhood memories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India is synonymous with Bollywood, Hinduism, Taj Mahal, corruption, caste system, poverty, lack of good governance but vibrant economy.</td>
<td>India is a land of diversity, home to various shrines and holy places, holding prime importance for multiple religions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians are nationalist, patriotic, mistrustful.</td>
<td>Are there one kind of Indians? They are human beings first and Indians later. I found Indians to be very amicable, respectful, and helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians are opportunistic and crafty... Hindus grab every opportunity to make advancement at any level of social and political life.</td>
<td>The Indians seemed awfully familiar! They are closest to Pakistanis in a lot many ways: emotional level, cultural understanding, history, habits, and most importantly, language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians lack the will to foster peaceful relations with Pakistan, which in fact would benefit both of us mutually.</td>
<td>Indians are hospitable, down-to-earth, intelligent, hard-working, good friends, respectful, humble, secular, conscious of their political norms and uphold the freedom of their political institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An aggressor that has suppressed the rights of the Kashmiris, and continues to deny basic freedoms to them.</td>
<td>The situation in Kashmir is complex. While there is no denying the magnitude of human rights violations against the Muslims, the views of participants from Jammu and Ladakh as also those of the Pandits need to be considered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of a liberal and secular education, I do not feel any animosity towards Indians, for I know that history has been distorted in both countries to justify mutual hostility.</td>
<td>The state elites and capitalists have exploited and oppressed the impoverished masses in India as much as they have in Pakistan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

109 Select responses which captured the primary themes listed by participants have been shared here. The statements in the tables are verbatim quotes from the Indian and Pakistani participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What comes to your mind when you think of ‘the other’ country?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indian Responses: Baseline</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An oft-misunderstood and mismanaged country…Pakistan suffers from an identity crisis…Its development is marred by religious extremism, terrorism, political instability, and economic mismanagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistanis (and the Generals in particular) cannot be trusted. They don’t want genuine peace. They want to seek revenge for the loss of the Eastern Wing, which became Bangladesh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistanis are religious and emotional…They are in need of an honest leadership… They need to give attention to their minorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistanis want to integrate the Kashmir Valley into Pakistan on the basis of it being a Muslim majority area. They want to internationalize the Kashmir issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The difficulties involved in getting a visa to travel there…Pakistanis are still imprisoned by the past…Their patriotism is meshed with anti-India narratives of partition and war.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹¹⁰ The reference to ‘the other’ country, in the endline survey, as the ‘homeland of one’s ancestors’ was interesting because most participants did not mention this in the baseline questionnaires. The endline surveys, however, were replete with comments about the context that the Workshops provided for them to reconnect with their roots, and learn more about their family’s history and close ties with the land (and its people) now seen as ‘the other’
Figure 1f: Changing Perceptions of Women of ‘The Other’ Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pakistani Responses: Baseline</th>
<th>Pakistani Responses: Endline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Indian women wear saris, Bollywood, <em>Saas Bahu</em> serials, Aishwarya Rai, Katrina Kaif…</td>
<td>• Women riding scooters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Violence against women: rape, dowry, harassment.</td>
<td>• Violence against women: sexual assault stories against women and girls.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indian Responses: Baseline</th>
<th>Indian Responses: Endline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pakistani women have limited rights. They don’t have much of a role to play in the political and economic life of Pakistan.</td>
<td>• Pakistani women go out of the house to work and earn a living. They are journalists, educators, doctors, management professionals. And they speak their mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They cover their head with the <em>hijab</em> or the <em>burkha</em>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ms. Anna-Kaisa Heikkinen (Special Adviser for International Affairs to the Prime Minister of Finland, Helsinki) and Prof. Swaran Singh (Faculty Member, Center for International Politics, Organization, and Disarmament, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi) at a Roundtable on *Regional Identity and Security* held as part of the Fifth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop in 2006.
Annexure 2

Participant Formulations on Jammu and Kashmir

Figure 2a: Joint Proposal for Jammu and Kashmir drafted by participants from India and Pakistan at the First Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop titled *Rehumanizing The Other* (2001)

- Both governments will follow a policy of maximum restraint.

- Withdrawal of security forces from Jammu and Kashmir (on both sides of the LoC) with the long-term goal of complete demilitarization.

- Establishment of an LoC Monitoring Commission (comprising retired members of the armed forces, government officials, civil society leaders, grassroots practitioners, and journalists from the two countries with an appointed third party to mediate any disputes that may arise). The primary purpose of the Commission would be to monitor adherence to the ceasefire along the LoC.

- A referendum on the political aspirations of the people who reside in the former princely state (in the presence of Indian, Pakistani, and international observers). This should be preceded by trust-building and trauma healing dialogues on both sides of the LoC.

- Kashmiri people should be represented at all levels of the negotiation process. Their grievances and aspirations should receive primary attention.

- Kashmiri ‘prisoners of war’ should be released.

- Increase cooperation between governments and NGO/civil society groups working in Jammu and Kashmir. Governments should involve people from different sectors of peacebuilding as well as professions such as business, media, and education.

- Nonviolence should be used as a preferred conflict resolution methodology.

- Communication should not be suspended. The dialogue should be sustained with government/track one leaders meeting at least three times in a year.

- Governments on both sides should consult political parties in the opposition.

- Travel restrictions should be relaxed—particularly with respect to Indians visiting Muzaffarabad and Pakistanis visiting Srinagar.
Figure 2b: Peacebuilding timeline drafted by Indian and Pakistani participants at the Alumni Workshop titled Collaborative Explorations (November 2006)

2030

COMMONWEALTH/ CONDOMINIUM

OPENING OF ALL TRADE ROUTES
FREE TRADE BETWEEN ALL OF KASHMIR
OR TRADE BETWEEN INDIA & PAK
THROUGH/BETWEEN KASHMIR

INITIATION OF REHABILITATION
OF THE MINORITIES
PROPOSAL FOR VISA ABOLISHMENT
FOR ALL OF KASHMIR

DECOMMISSION OF ARMS:
ESTABLISHING AN ARMS-FREE
ZONE

PROPOSE CONCEPT OF
DUAL NATIONALITY

SETTING UP ID CARDS
FOR ALL OF KASHMIR

ABOLISHMENT OF VISAS

2030

2020

2018

2016

2014

2013

RESTRICTED MOVEMENT
OF TRADE

BROKERING A TREATY THAT
NEITHER WILL GO AFTER IT

DEMILITARIZATION OF
SIACHIN & DEC. OF NO MAN’S LAND

VISA RELAXATION

ESTABLISHMENT OF A HRC & BODY THAT WORKS TOWARDS
INITIATION OF DIALOGUE & RECONCILIATORY PROCESS

NO MILITARY IN KASHMIR
(ONLY ON THE PAK-KASHMIR & INDIA-KASHMIR BORDER)
2050
COMPLETE SOVEREIGNTY

SETTING UP OF ASIAN TRADE ROUTES VIA KASHMIR FOR INDIA & PAKISTAN

ESTABLISHMENT OF A KASHMIRI PARLIAMENT WITH ASSEMBLIES FOR 7 DISTRICTS
RESERVATION: 30% FOR MINORITIES
20% FOR WOMEN
NOMINATED REPRESENTATIVES FROM PAKISTAN & INDIA (AMBASSADORIAL ROLE)

COMPLETE DEVOLUTION OF POWER
FOR SELF DETERMINATION

NO MILITARY IN PAK/INDIA BORDERS ALSO
SELF GOVT

PLEBISCITE (TRILATERALLY MONITORED)

ISSUANCE OF KASHMIRI CURRENCY (EQUALLY WORKABLE WITH PAK INDIAN RUPEES)

REVIEW OF KASHMIRI CURRICULUM BY A JOINT BODY OF EDUCATIONISTS FROM BOTH SIDES

ID CARDS OF KASHMIRS

RETURN OF DIASPORA MINORITIES
REHAB OF MINORITIES

2022
2024
2025
2030
2050

ADDRESS CHINA ISSUE: AKSAI CHIN TO BE GIVEN BACK TO KASHMIR (NOT TO INDIA OR PAK)
Figure 2c: Joint Formulation on Jammu and Kashmir drafted by the Indian and Pakistani delegations (which included participants from Jammu and Kashmir) at the 2005 Workshop titled *Envisioning Futures: Dialogue and Conflict Transformation*

**Territory:** The pre-1947 princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and the descendants of that original population as on 15 August 1947.

**Security:** Kashmiris will be responsible for internal security. Externally, a security guaranteed by the armies of India, Pakistan, and China. None of the troops from the three countries would be inside the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, but only on the borders.

**Autonomy:** Short of complete political independence, full scope for autonomy.

**Sovereignty:** It is not an option at present; possible in the future, if all the parties including India, Pakistan, Jammu and Kashmir (on both sides of the LoC), and China agree. However, at present, Kashmiris will have the freedom to travel across the LoC as well as to initiate a robust system for trade and investment linkages between the two side (of Kashmir).

**Democracy:** Guarantees for all minorities, based on a multicultural model.

---

*Mr. Bhabananda Takhellambam (Lecturer, Department of History, Manipur University, Imphal), Dr. Ahmed Ijaz Malik (Faculty Member, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad), and Mr. Imran Awan (Political and Security Analyst and Managing Trustee for the Karam Bakhsh Awan Trust, Islamabad) at the Alumni Engagement Workshop titled Collaborative Explorations.*
Annexure 3

WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop Publications

CT Working Papers & Discussion Papers


---

111 This is a select list of WISCOMP publications that emerged out of the dialogues at the Conflict Transformation Workshops (2001–2012).


**Peace Prints: South Asian Journal of Peacebuilding**


**Resource Books & Reports**


**Collaborative Research Studies**


**Films & Multimedia Resources**


About WISCOMP

WISCOMP was established in 1999 as an initiative of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness The Dalai Lama, New Delhi. A not-for-profit and non-denominational organization, the Foundation was set up in 1990 with the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to His Holiness The Dalai Lama. In the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, the Foundation brings together women and men of different faiths and nationalities through initiatives that seek to contribute to a global ethic of nonviolence, coexistence, and gender equity. WISCOMP works at the intersection of conflict transformation, peace education, human security, and gender studies in South Asia. It draws on innovative and experiential pedagogies that synergize research, training, and praxis. These are used to build linkages between individuals who work in the fields of education, conflict resolution, law, public policy, and the creative arts.

About the Authors

Meenakshi Gopinath is Principal of Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi, and Founder and Hon. Director of WISCOMP. She holds the distinction of being the first woman to serve as a Member of the National Security Advisory Board of India. A participant in several multi-track peace initiatives in Kashmir and between India and Pakistan (including the Neemrana Track Two Dialogues and the Pakistan India Peoples’ Forum for Peace and Democracy), Meenakshi is the author of *Pakistan in Transition* and co-author of *Conflict Resolution: Trends and Prospects*. In recognition of her contribution to the field of women’s education and empowerment, she has received several awards, some of which include, the Padma Shri Award from the President of India, the Rajiv Gandhi Award for Excellence in Education, the South Asian Recognition Award for Social Harmony, and the International Lifetime Achievement Award for Outstanding Work in the Field of Justice, Equity, and Peace.

Manjrika Sewak is Assistant Director at WISCOMP. 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, Manjrika 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.
Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Core 4A, Upper Ground Floor, India Habitat Center
Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel: 91-11-24648450  Fax: 91-11-24648451
Email: wiscomp2006@gmail.com
Website: www.wiscomp.org / www.furhddl.org

ISBN: 978-81-923813-2-9