

Editorial

The pervasiveness of everyday violence in South Asia is combined by a deep ambivalence towards it at several levels of state and society. Violence that was often seen as an *effect* of underlying societal tensions and conflicts has become integral to the construction of intra community solidarity. Consequently, the armed security apparatus of the state (which seeks to use legitimate force to curb violence), has come to be replicated by an equally well-armed set of opponents who resort to violence as a primary method of resolving conflicts. This has created a vicious cycle of conflict and discord, where each side enjoys legitimacy accorded by its constituency. There is an urgent need to break this cycle and to search for alternatives to processes of otherization and militarization.

This volume of *Peace Prints* seeks to explore how formal education can be used to expound the futility of suffering caused both by overt and covert violence and to cultivate non violent alternatives for resolving conflicts. The articles in the volume are largely perspectives from the field from which innovative theoretical approaches might emerge. They provide insights into the challenges and possibilities of educating *for* peace in the conflict prone states of South Asia that are deeply divided along the faultlines of religion, ethnicity, language, class and gender.

Education can provide opportunities for resolving conflicts only when it enables individuals to acquire familiarity with the beliefs, values and perspectives of others, cultivate a willingness and ability to communicate their own position, and to critically revisit their a prioris. This reflexivity is crucial to peaceful resolution of conflicts. The cultivation of such attitudes is vital in a context like South Asia, primarily because the cultural heterogeneity of the region necessitates acceptance of the inherent limits of our beliefs, values and ways of thinking.

Until recently, research on ‘peace education’ was largely West centric. The growth of scholarly interest in Asia to apply, adapt and critically look at this discourse is generating several alternative perspectives. S.P. Udayakumar, in *Peace Education in India: A Proposal*, underscores the importance of recognizing that there are no intrinsic methods of resolving conflicts. Instead there is a need for conscious crafting of attitudes that can lead to interrogation of existing paradigms and stimulate creative ways of addressing differences that have the potential to trigger violence. Grounding his argument on the significance of cultural linkages among South Asian nations to build peace, he outlines the multiplicity of approaches available to educate for peace in the region which continues to be marred by conflicts both at the interstate and intrastate levels.

Addressing some fundamental concerns about the underlying philosophy of education that is conducive to peace and the prototypical attributes of education that engenders peace, the article *Education for Peace: Kaleidoscopic Musings* by Shweta Singh focuses on creating a classroom that not only prepares the young for non-violent behaviour but also motivates them to see justice as the core of peace. She argues that if education in India is to expand its role, it must move beyond the existing ‘transmission model’

whereby received wisdom is transferred from one generation to the next. She proposes the alternative in a “**learner centered classroom**”, which provides both openness and avenues for critical engagement. By encouraging the student to develop cognitive skills such as reflective thinking and problem solving techniques and motivating them to generate, discover, build and enlarge their framework of knowledge, Singh avers that such a classroom can help both the teacher and the student to cultivate a commitment to work towards ‘**just peace**’.

Given that religious differences have often been used to incite violence in South Asia the next two articles deal with the issues arising from assertion of religious identity. Meenakshi Gopinath in *Educating for Coexistence: Challenges and Possibilities in India* delineates the creative possibilities presented by educational practices to create **spaces for coexistence**. She explores the historical context within which the idea of ‘unity in diversity’ came to inform education policies in the early years of India’s independence and maps some of the developments in education policy and practice that have generated fissures within and between communities. She cautions that unless simultaneous changes are brought about to redress structural inequities, merely changing curricula and pedagogy would not repair relations between the different communities.

Addressing a related concern, Zahid Shahab Ahmed in *Madrassa Education in the Pakistani Context: Challenges, Reforms and Future Directions* critically analyzes the widespread tendency of reviling Islamic educational institutions in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. By focusing on the recent madrasa reforms in Pakistan as a case in point, he seeks to provide an alternative perspective on how religious instruction can provide space for overcoming prejudice and sectarianism.

Drawing lessons from East Asia and the United States through an empirical exploration of the question of racial intolerance in societies where large scale in-migration has occurred, Kevin Kester and Brigid Glustein in *Linking Gender and Race in Peace Education: Pedagogies to address Difference in the Classroom* suggest that sensitivity to gender differences can be a useful strategy to promote respect for other differences based on race, language, ethnicity or class.

Heather Millhouse in *The Place of Peace* draws attention to a particular gap in the theory and practice of peace education- the absence of any discussion on barriers to educating for peace. To gauge the perception of barriers that peace educators encounter, Millhouse uses a survey of a group of Australian students training to become educators. She concludes that unless structural changes germane to the socio-cultural context become part of the efforts to educate for peace, transformative change may be difficult to bring about. Consequently, she argues that those who wish to use education as a tool for peacebuilding **must** look for localized solutions.

Illustrating the diverse strategies adopted by conflict resolution programs in developed countries as well as states in South America, Jennifer Batton’s contribution, *Peace and Conflict Education around the Globe* provides insights into some of the methodologies that are being used to respond to increasing levels of violence and conflict. Her lucid

description of the various programs can serve as an important resource for educators as well as policy makers.

Education and the Architecture of an Inclusive Society, by Jyoti Bose foregrounds the issue of access to quality education and how the denial of this opportunity has led to widening chasms in Indian society. She sees the response to this **inequality predicament** as essential to resolution of any conflicts arising from caste, class and religious differences.

The question whether education can be an effective tool for building peace between communities and states in South Asia has no simple answers. Any discussion on the subject is bound to raise an array of responses. The ongoing debates on the shortcomings of existing systems of education in South Asia have seldom focused on its relevance to the understanding and possible mitigation of conflicts that societies with deep cleavages reveal. This volume of *Peace Prints* does not seek to settle ongoing disputes, but makes an attempt to explore why education should continue to be on the agenda of peace builders in the region.