



WISCOMP

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WISCOMP

Foundation for Universal Responsibility of HH The Dalai Lama

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As the specter of violent conflict continues to haunt people's lives across the world, we at WISCOMP, continue our efforts to foreground the possibilities for non-violent change and peaceful coexistence.

In its seventh year of engagement with issues in peacebuilding and security, WISCOMP has evolved and grown over time, advancing its programs under the rubrics of academic research, action research, and praxis and capacity-building. Integral to the academic enrichment component of WISCOMP's work is its *Scholar of Peace* fellowship program. This issue of *Update* reflects the evolution and growth of this flagship initiative.

The fellowship program encourages innovative, multi-disciplinary, theoretical engagement and research

on issues that emerge at the intersection of the discourses on gender, security and conflict transformation. Since the time of the program's inception in 2000, WISCOMP has awarded fellowships to 60 women and men based in South Asia, to work in these crucial areas, and to focus attention on how gender perspectives may inform the discourse. The emphasis is on the potential of research and praxis to impact and catalyze change in settings of tension and violence.

The fellowships are awarded under three categories: *Academic Research*, *Media Projects* and *Special Projects*. Fellowships for Academic Research are expected to lead to the production of a publishable monograph by the end of the grant period. These monographs are published as *WISCOMP Perspectives* and *WISCOMP Discussion Papers*. The Media Fellowships are designed to support young and mid-career journalists seeking to focus on in-depth stories. The Special Project Fellowships seek to identify and support talent that explores innovative approaches and uses alternative and creative media such as film, art, theater, dance and installations.

The number of, and diversity in, applications has grown substantially with each passing year. This includes

diversity in terms of geographical outreach, social and professional backgrounds, and areas of proposed research.

In October 2006, a select group of WISCOMP fellows participated in the symposium *Dialogue Processes in India: Prospects and Problems*, identifying dialogic engagement as the hallmark of their projects. This newsletter presents the learnings from the symposium.

As part of its efforts to build synergies between academic engagement and the practice of peacebuilding, it is WISCOMP's attempt to foreground the learnings from its symposia and roundtables at training programs and practitioners' conventions. Insights on dialogic engagement have informed the new components added to the canvas of WISCOMP's initiative in Jammu and Kashmir, *Athwaas*. These include the convention *Women in Dialogue: Envisioning the Road Ahead in Jammu and Kashmir*, which brought together 65 women and men from Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh to open dialogic conversations between civil society, policy makers and administrators; and *The Interfaith Workshop* which explored religion both as a source of conflict and a resource for peacebuilding.

– The WISCOMP Team

Inside...

<i>Scholar of Peace Fellowship Program</i>	2
<i>Dialogue for Peace</i>	3
<i>Review</i>	6
<i>Women in Dialogue:</i>	
<i>Breaking New Ground</i>	7
<i>Peacebuilding in Jammu and Kashmir:</i>	
<i>Foregrounding the Role of Women</i>	12
<i>Religion, Reconciliation and</i>	
<i>Coexistence: An Inter-faith Workshop</i>	13
<i>Announcements</i>	15
<i>End Note</i>	16

WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) is an initiative of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness The Dalai Lama, New Delhi. The Foundation brings together people of different faiths, creeds, professions and nationalities in a manner that respects and encourages diversity of beliefs and practices and promotes and devises strategies to transform this commitment into an instrument of social change. It works to develop nonviolent methods, improve communication between religion and science, and secure human rights and democratic freedom.

Scholar of Peace Fellowship Program

Fostering the motivation to know... the power to think... the spirit to interrogate

Encouraging academic and action research on issues in security and peacebuilding has been the leitmotif of WISCOMP's programs. Through this, WISCOMP seeks to contribute to an inclusive, people-oriented discourse on issues of security, which respects diversity and foregrounds the perspectives of women and the hitherto marginalized.

The *Scholar of Peace* fellowship program has been an integral component of WISCOMP's efforts to facilitate theory-building and innovative research on holistic paradigms that address the resolution and transformation of intra and inter-state conflicts. It aims at furthering engagement with areas such as human security, conflict resolution, multi-track peace initiatives, terrorism, regional cooperation, human rights, governance et al. The focus is on projects that explore the interface between gender and these issues, within the terrain of peacebuilding and non-traditional formulations on security. The program has grown in myriad ways, empowering young women and men – academicians, grassroots workers, practitioners, media professionals – and facilitating a process whereby their voices are heard by policy makers. WISCOMP has consciously tried, through this program, to bridge the gap between policy and practice, the world of academia and the NGO sector, and senior and younger professionals.

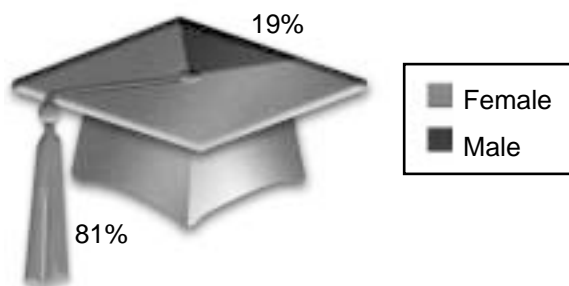
In the last six years, WISCOMP has awarded over 60 fellowships in the three delineated categories: Academic Research, Media projects and Special Projects. Applicants come from a variety of professional backgrounds including academia, social movements, gender studies, peacebuilding, diplomacy, human rights, defense, law, business, media and the arts. The awards cover periods ranging from three months to more than one year.

The outcomes of the Academic Research fellowships constitute the growing body of WISCOMP work published as *Perspectives* and *Discussion Papers* which now number 23 and 11 respectively. Several of these publications have since been reviewed in the print media and have been widely circulated and discussed at various fora. While fellowships are available to scholars at any stage of their careers, post-graduate research or a doctoral degree are a prerequisite for proposals under this category. The studies undertaken are expected to provide comprehensive information on hitherto neglected issues and offer options for nonviolent transformation in regions of protracted conflict.

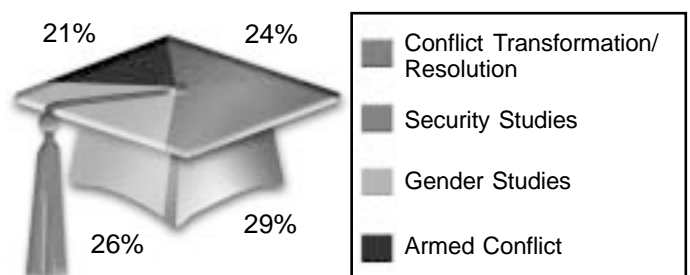
Media fellowship awardees are required to publish a stipulated number of articles in established publications. Further, the Special Projects employ various media including theater, art, dance, dialogue groups and the visual and print media, to develop inclusive and gender-sensitive perspectives. Fellowships under this category encourage NGO workers, activists, grassroots practitioners, artists, policymakers and fulltime professionals to bring their learning and expertise to a wider audience. The special projects powerfully highlight the role of the arts in dialogue and healing.

The program not only provides the fellows a forum for expression but also focuses on capacity building and training for research. In this vein, the fellowship program works hand-in-hand with the Mentor Program to facilitate academic enrichment and career advancement. The Mentor Program provides a strong platform for WISCOMP Fellows to interact with expert professionals and practitioners in various fields as they guide them through their projects. It opens up avenues for bringing together experience and potential in a stimulating exchange. The one-on-one interaction engenders the overall development of Fellows in line

WISCOMP Fellows: Male-Female Ratio



Fellowship Projects: Areas of Research



(Contd. on page 11)

Dialogue for Peace Scholar of Peace Fellows Symposium

WISCOMP organized its first Fellows Symposium **Dialogue Processes in India: Prospects and Problems**, on August 26-28, 2006, in New Delhi. The symposium aimed at providing a forum for thirty of the peace scholars across different cycles to meet, exchange findings and draw from their collective learning experiences.

Dialogue was identified as a cross-cutting theme that linked the varied experiences of the fellows across all cycles, working in different geographical areas of conflict. The symposium had three major thematic rubrics:

- i) **Understanding Dialogue** and building a framework of analysis
- ii) **Experiencing Dialogue** through a "Sustained Dialogue" workshop
- iii) **Framing Dialogue**: sharing of findings of completed fellowship work, as well as work in progress, and framing a dialogue around areas of commonality.

The term "dialogue" comes from the Greek word "dialogos" (*dia* = through, *logos* = word)

Dialogue is a process in which stakeholders to a conflict engage with issues and debate over ideas. A dialogue expands and may even deepen conflict in order to create

political and human capacities to solve problems. However, it is essential to **problematize dialogue** and to view it as a **continuous process** and not one that begins post conflict. Through the sessions in the symposium, various issues that were highlighted included:



From left to right: Ms. Rita Manchanda (Independent Analyst), Ms. Monisha Behal (Chairperson, North East Network), and WISCOMP Fellows Ms. Binalakshmi Nepram and Mr. Uddipan Dutta

- It is important that for dialogue there be **equality**, at the same time one cannot wait for equality to prevail, as it might then be too late for things to move forward.
- The structure of dialogue processes, justice mechanisms as well as models of conflict transformation need to be **democratic**. All the parties to the conflict, however weak economically, socially or politically they may be, should be involved in the dialogic engagement.
- **Gender** was foregrounded in the deliberations. It was recognized that the dynamics of power and the patriarchal orientation of the concepts of rights and justice often go against women. Thus it is crucial that they engage as active participants in processes of dialogue.



Anupama Sekhar, Scholar of Peace Fellow 2004
Special Project: Mezzanine - Youth Writing Peace

Young people bring their own innovative approaches and tools to peacebuilding. A key learning from the WISCOMP fellowship project was that writing and visual art are excellent entry points to engage various groups (including women and youth) in dialogue and learning on political issues. The ICT medium excites young people and this excitement holds tremendous potential for peace education.

There is an urgent need to link up young people across cultures, countries and communities in conflict as also those living in peace. In the contemporary global village, such a 'dialogue of life' becomes integral to building a worldwide culture of peace. I am currently exploring areas of intersection between art, politics and gender through research and teaching projects. I am writing a monograph that looks at ancient Indian dramatic theory through the gender lens. This work is being undertaken through a Fellowship awarded by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, GoI. I am also developing a teaching project that employs the arts (traditional and contemporary) as an entry point to teach international relations at the postgraduate level.

- Conventional notions of power, domination and control, pose significant **structural challenges** to dialogue processes.
- Dialogue cannot be successful if unless it brings about a **deep-rooted change**; it cannot merely paper over the cracks.
- A dialogue process cannot be sustainable without a common and mutually agreed-upon level of **tolerance**.
- Caution should be exercised in replicating models of dialogue. **Contextualizing** the dialogue process to the political and cultural ethos of the region is important.

To facilitate the understanding of dialogue as a process, the symposium proceedings concentrated on **zones of active conflict** in the north-east of India, Kashmir and Nepal. The presentations were led by the WISCOMP fellows who live and work in these regions and helped provide a holistic picture of ground realities that prevail in these regions. The communal conflict in Gujarat came up during discussions. The fellows expressed their distress with the current situation where a minority community is being increasingly marginalized, creating differences that pose significant impediments to dialogue.



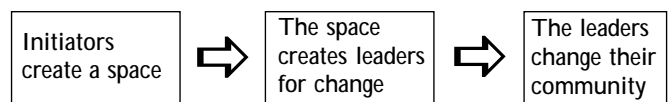
Ms. Jaya Iyer making a presentation during the colloquium

The participants agreed that dialogue creates awareness of a **multiplicity of worldviews**. WISCOMP consultant on

Sustained Dialogue Priya Parker conducted a workshop, to introduce the participants to the methodology of Sustained Dialogue. The workshop emphasized that dialogue is a dynamic process but is just one of many tools to build peace.

Sustained 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, even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up her or his identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims that he or she will act differently toward the other.

Sustained Dialogue's **Theory of Change**:



Teddy Nemeroff, IISD

To facilitate a deeper understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of dialogue as well as locate them within a political framework and a philosophical understanding, Father Rudolf Heredia presented a paper on dialogue, foregrounding pluralism and tolerance. It located dialogue as an important component of life in a plural society. In traditional societies, plurality was integrated by resorting to a definition of hierarchy. The challenge today is to integrate differences within the context of democracy. For a dialogic engagement to cope with structural pluralism, authority needs to be devolved (not decentralized) to the lower levels.

The fellows participated in **working group discussions**. They were divided into groups on the basis of their areas of interest and their fellowship projects. The participants then shared their findings with the larger group.

The group discussing **Gender and Armed Conflict in North-East India** concluded that in the North-East, ethnic problems



Bhabananda Takhellambam, Scholar of Peace Fellow 2000
Women's uprising in Manipur – A Legacy Continued

For the fellowship project, initially I set out to chronicle the women's uprising and understand the history of Manipur through this. However, in the process I explored other related issues such as state repression and its impact on women. The body of women has become the site of atrocities and injustices characteristic of the armed conflict in the state.

For me, the project has opened new avenues for research. The fellowship was my first step towards exploring issues in conflict transformation, and armed conflict and gender. Apart from teaching History of East Asia at the Manipur University, I am currently engaged in writing on "Manipur: Recent Past and Contemporary Crises", for a fellowship awarded by the Social Science Research Council, New York.

are becoming more and more pronounced. Latent tensions arising out of ethnic differences are not only disrupting the economic, social and political life of the people in the region, but are proving to be a major impediment to the dialogue process. Women are the worst affected victims of conflict and violence.

Deliberating on **Gender and Issues of Displacement**, the second group stated that it is the more vulnerable sections that are affected the most because of development-induced displacement. Displaced *adivasis* face immense challenges in adjusting to changed agricultural patterns and resettlement areas. They also pointed out that it is these so-called weaker sections that are always sidelined in dialogic engagement.

The working group on **Gender, Law and Conflict Resolution** examined different ways of looking at inter-religious conflict, and exploring new models of intervention by integrating social and legal discourse. They called for the coming together of progressive women's groups working in the area of Alternative Dispute Resolution. The group emphasized that though there are various debates about the institutionalization of these mechanisms, the strength of these mechanisms lies in the fact that they exist outside the legal system.

The **working groups** deliberated on:

- *Gender and Armed Conflict in North-East India*
- *Gender and Issues of Displacement*
- *Gender, Law and Conflict Resolution*
- *Gender, Identity and Interfaith Dialogue*
- *Gender, Media and Armed Conflict in Jammu and Kashmir*
- *Gender and Security*
- *Gender and Peacebuilding: Space for Creative Expressions*

The group on **Gender, Identity and Interfaith Dialogue** examined violence within the context of religious communities. The group as a whole expressed their hope in the potential of



From left to right: WISCOMP Fellows Ms. Babita Basnet, Dr. A. Subramanyam Raju, and Dr. Chavi Bhargava Sharma, and WISCOMP Consultant on Sustained Dialogue, Ms. Priya Parker

inter-faith and inter-community dialogues. They said that these dialogues should be initiated by bringing to light communities living in shared spaces. One example of this is Ram-Rahim Nagar, a colony in Ahmedabad with 20,000 Hindus and Muslims living together. In the last four riots, no one in this colony has been harmed. Despite the chaos and brutality in other parts of the state, the people in this colony have co-existed peacefully. For these people living in impoverished conditions, the struggle for their daily needs accords a higher priority than communal brutality. Such success stories provide both a context and an impetus for dialogue. The group felt that classical literature of the region, popular festivals such as kite-flying that have mass-popularity regardless of any religious affiliations, may go a long way in fostering dialogue between estranged communities.

The working group on **Gender, Media and Armed Conflict in Jammu and Kashmir** felt that the stakeholders in the present conflict need to be more proactive about defining their agenda.

(Contd. on page 11)



Nirekha De Silva, Scholar of Peace Fellow 2005
Transitional Justice for Ex-women Combatants

My project conclusions focus on women in the army and women who are part of the LTTE; an introduction to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and an analysis of human needs which are protected as human rights in the processes of reintegration, portrayal of psychological barriers in reintegration. I have also worked on accounting obstacles faced in social adjustment to civil life, comprehensive recommendations to re-integrate women combatants into society.

I am planning to undertake work on issues with regard to families of the disappeared.

Name of the Book: **Images of Muslim Women: A Study on the Representation of Muslim Women in the Media 1985-2001**

Author: **Sabina Kidwai** is WISCOMP *Scholar of Peace* fellow 2000, and has worked on the reviewed publication as part of the fellowship. Ms. Kidwai teaches at the Mass Communications Research Centre, Jamia Milia Islamia.

Reviewer: **Yoginder Sikand** is WISCOMP *Scholar of Peace* fellow 2004, and edits a monthly web magazine called *Qalandar*, which focuses on issues related to Islam and interfaith relations in South Asia. Dr. Sikand is faculty member, Jamia Milia Islamia.

Publisher: **WISCOMP, New Delhi**
Pages: 140

Media discourses about and representations of Muslims exercise a powerful influence in shaping negative stereotypical notions of the community and of Islam as the 'other – as 'exotic', 'different', 'obscurantist', 'backward', 'extremist' and so on. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way the media represents Muslim women. This study provides interesting insights into how influential sections of the Indian media portray Muslim women and how these impact on debates about Muslims in general. This the author does through an incisive content analysis of selected 'mainstream' Indian English dailies, supplemented with interviews with a sample of female college students in Delhi, Muslims as well as non-Muslims.

Kidwai argues that central to the discourse of conservative and traditionalist Indian Islamic organizations is the notion of the ideal Muslim woman as the bearer of tradition and religious authenticity. In a context where Muslims in India are faced with a growing sense of insecurity and threats to their identity, the appeal of the normative discourse of such groups is somewhat understandable. Large sections of the media see these religious groups as representatives of all Muslims, and this is reflected in how they represent Muslim women – as identified and defined solely by their religion. In this way, Kidwai points out, there is a remarkable similarity in the approach of the 'mainstream' media as well as conservative ulama and Islamic groups. They assume Muslims to be a monolith, whose sole identifying marker is adherence to or association with Islam. In the process, the complex and multiple identities of Muslim women – the fact that they are divided in

terms of class, caste, region, language and so on – is carefully ignored. This further feeds into deep-rooted biases about Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular, that abound in influential sections of the Indian media.

Kidwai argues this point forcefully in her analysis of the reporting of selected Indian newspapers on a host of controversial issues to do with Muslim women, including the Shah Bano case, fatwas allowing for triple talaq in one sitting, cases of forced veiling and child marriages. Many of these reports, she argues, focused on the debates among the conservative ulama, reared in a tradition of patriarchy, about the Islamicity or otherwise of these practices, rather than on what Muslim women themselves had to say. The debate on Muslim women, then, is transformed into one on Islamic law rather than on the rights of Muslim women. The struggles of Muslim women to speak for themselves and offer their own understandings of Islam on these controversies received but little attention. This reflected the understanding, which ulama and Islamic groups consistently seek to put forward, that issues concerning Muslim women must be seen purely through the lens of religion, as defined by these groups, alone. The controversies around these issues were used by influential sections of the media to argue the case that the ulama were the normative representatives of all Muslims, and, given their views on some of these issues, that Islam is by definition 'misogynist', 'patriarchal', 'cruel' and so forth. The views of Muslim reformists who used Islamic arguments to counter the views of the conservative ulama and to present more gender-friendly understandings of Islam on these issues were given much less attention. Kidwai's in-depth content analysis of media portrayals of Muslim women reveals a marked tendency to homogenize all Muslim women and to present them as uniformly oppressed creatures. Media reporting of issues related to Muslim women is often sensationalist and exaggerated. It is as if all Muslim women are veiled from head to toe, closeted in their homes, forbidden from working outside and dutiful servants of their husbands, who can divorce them or take a second wife at will. It is also as if all Muslim women uniformly follow every dictate of the conservative ulama, something that is far from being the case. Ignoring the fact that patriarchy is a pan-Indian phenomenon and not a Muslim monopoly, there is a tendency in the media to portray Islam and Muslims as particularly anti-women. Positive images of Muslim women are seldom encountered in the media, probably because these would go counter the sedulously cultivated stereotype that the media wishes, unconsciously or otherwise, to reinforce. Hence, it comes as no surprise that Muslim women are generally discussed in the media only in terms of some controversy or the other, which

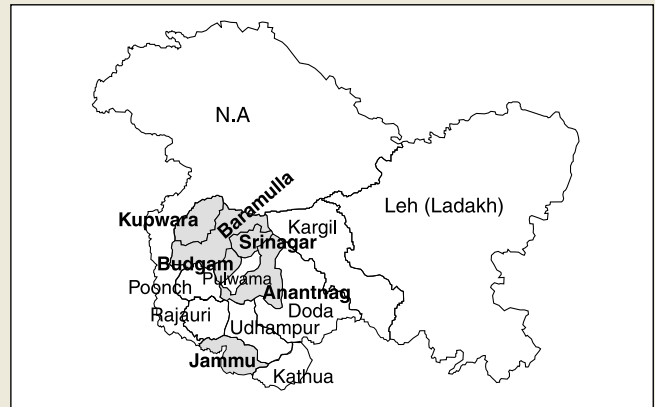
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Expanding Circles of Peace...

WISCOMP's initiative in Kashmir, *Athwaas*, has been working to expand constituencies of peace in the region through a range of activities such as trauma counseling, active listening, and the articulation of women's concerns to policymakers and government interlocutors. The initiative comprises a group of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh women, and one of its main objectives is to transform the perspective of victimhood and scarcity to one of empowerment and abundance.

Athwaas members have set up **Samanbal centers** in five districts of J & K with an overarching aspiration to provide safe spaces to women and men for trust building and trauma healing. Districts where *Samanbal* Centres have been set up by *Athwaas*:

- Kupwara – Widows' Support Center
- Budgam – Psychosocial Counseling Center
- Jammu – Income Generation Center
- Baramulla – Self-Help Groups' Network
- Anantnag – (Educational) HelpLine Center



Women in Dialogue: Breaking New Ground

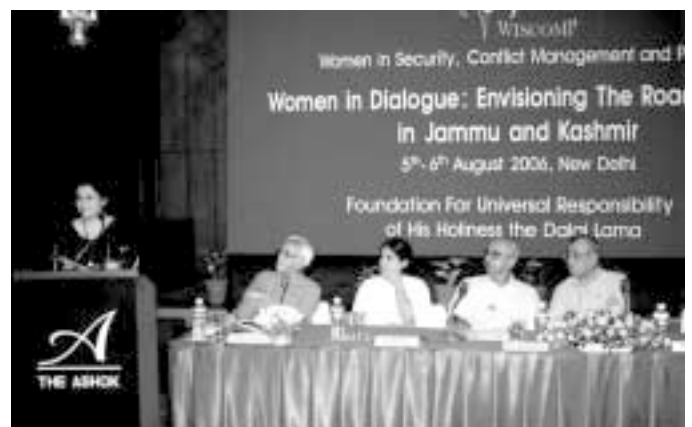
A two-day convention *Women in Dialogue: Envisioning the Road Ahead in Jammu and Kashmir*, organized by WISCOMP on August 5 and 6, 2006, in New Delhi was the outcome of a conscious decision on the part of WISCOMP to acknowledge and work with the constituency of women peacemakers in Kashmir.

The vexed issue of Jammu and Kashmir has been debated at various fora around the world for more than six decades now. Initially, envisioned as a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan, the outbreak of the armed conflict in the Indian administered part of the Kashmir valley since 1989 drove home the point that for sustainable peace the voice of the people of Jammu and Kashmir cannot be ignored.

The convention brought together 65 participants from the three regions of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, in order to facilitate a dialogue foregrounding **gender and civil society engagement**. Within the Indian administered part of Jammu and Kashmir, there has been an attempt to initiate talks with the so-called separatists represented by the Hurriyat Conference since 2003. The roundtable conference called by the Prime Minister, in Srinagar on May 24 and 25, 2006, was envisioned as part of this process of engaging with different stakeholders within Jammu and Kashmir. The inclusions and exclusions at this

roundtable have been the subject of heated discussions and debates. Women have been conspicuous only by their absence in the dialogic processes that are now unfolding in Jammu and Kashmir.

(Contd. on page 10)



From left to right: Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member of the Planning Commission and the Founder Member of Muslim Women's Forum; Mr. Hamid Ansari, Chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities; Ms. Hafiza Muzaffar, Secretary of the State Commission for Women, Srinagar; Mr. George Verghese, Visiting Professor, Center for Policy Research; and Justice A.M. Ahmadi, former Chief Justice of India



Mezzanine: Youth Writing Peace
Anupama Sekhar, 2003



DIALOGUE AMONG CULTURES

Why the need? Why now?



Storytelling and
Puppetry as Tools of
Conflict Resolution:
Experiences from
Kashmir

Anurupa Roy, 2005



Her Voice

Geeta Chandran
&
Anurupa Roy, 2000



Afghan Women: The Burden
Bearers of the Twenty-Year War

Mossarat Qadeem, 2002



(Contd. from page 7)

The convention set out to do the following:

- Identify and critically engage with the existing **conceptual and methodological frameworks** within which the current peace process in Jammu and Kashmir is located.
- Contribute proactively to the ongoing dialogue in Jammu and Kashmir by placing **women's perspectives** squarely on the table.
- Assess the impact of using the alphabet of **gender** to shape the dialogue process.
- Strengthen the **community of women peacebuilders** in Kashmir

The convention began with a plenary address by **Mr. Wajahat Habibullah**, former Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir (J&K) and currently Chief Information Commissioner, GoI, who emphasized the importance of letting **democracy** take root in Jammu and Kashmir. He said that the solution to the problems in Kashmir lies within the region, and in the hands of the people, and that dialogue and exchange of ideas will pave the path towards conflict resolution. Women are amongst the worst sufferers in the region and it is imperative that they rally together to build a movement for peace, he emphasized.

The convention grappled with the concerns: What do the women of Jammu and Kashmir see as the road ahead? Where, if at all, do they locate themselves in the larger peace process that is unfolding? What have been their experiences of the armed conflict and how can this experience shape prospective peace processes? The session *Envisioning New Roles for Women* brought forth different perspectives on women's engagement in the peace process. Panelist Dr. Rekha Chowdhury, Professor of Political Science, Jammu University, talked about the **fragmented social and political identities** of people in the region and the common suffering experienced by women in conflict regions. Highlighting the perceptible shift in attitudes, Dr. Chowdhury said that the people of the region, who once viewed each other with mistrust, today accept diverse realities and positions. They have come to recognize the plurality of problems and their possible resolutions. This sentiment was later echoed by senior journalist Mr. Syed Malik, who referred to the diminishing influence of militancy and the increasing preference for **non-violent instruments of protest**. The panelists:

- urged women to develop **political consciousness** and shun apathy;
- called for inclusive dialogues which move beyond patriarchal frameworks;
- foregrounded the importance of respect for **human rights, secularism** and equal opportunities for all.

One of the main components of the workshop was the organization of participants into four working groups, each of which discussed and put forth recommendations for the following areas:

■ Politics, Law and Governance: Alternative Pathways

The working group on 'Politics, Law and Governance' called for ease of communication and travel across the LoC; **zero tolerance for violence** of any kind, by any party; strengthening of the State Human Rights Commission; regular interactions on the lines of the *jansunvai* between the public and the working groups constituted by the Prime Minister's roundtable; and **rehabilitation** for widows and half widows across the state. Women should throw their weight behind any initiative across the LoC that promotes better **people-to-people interaction** rather than restricting themselves to gender-specific initiatives. It was also suggested that there should be a clear articulation from civil society that the **Kashmiri Pundits** are welcome to come back in small groups to their places of habitation and worship.

■ Women, Development and Economic Empowerment: Alternative Pathways

The group highlighted the need to encourage entrepreneurship through **micro-credit** schemes, facilitate **skill-building** to make women self-reliant, and ensure access to appropriate market channels.

■ Cultural Initiatives for Peace and Reconciliation: Alternative Pathways

Deliberating on cultural initiatives, the third group recommended a revival of the ethos of *Kashmiriyat*; promotion of indigenous **arts and crafts**; establishment of **community centers** for women; and introduction of **comparative religion as a subject of study** in educational institutions.

■ Health and Psychosocial Healing

The fourth group emphasized the development of **health infrastructure**; integration of mental and general health services; and **counseling** and sensitization to stress and trauma-related problems.

The convention provided the participants a forum to interact with eminent persons such as **Justice A. M. Ahmadi**, former Chief Justice of India; **Ambassador Hamid Ansari**, Chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities; **Dr. Syeda Hameed**, Member of the Planning Commission and the Founder Member of Muslim Women's Forum; and **Mr. N.N. Vohra**, the Center's interlocutor on Jammu and Kashmir, amongst others, therefore attempting to open dialogic conversations between civil society, policy makers and administrators.

Scholar of Peace Fellowship Program

(Contd. from page 2)

with career aspirations and personal advancement, needs and concerns.

WISCOMP believes that mentoring is a vehicle that promotes the development of insights, besides aiding in the processes of learning, reflection and communication. WISCOMP mentors engage with the cycle of planning, evaluation and review to effectively guide the Fellows. They also take initiative in keeping the channels of communication open and exploratory.

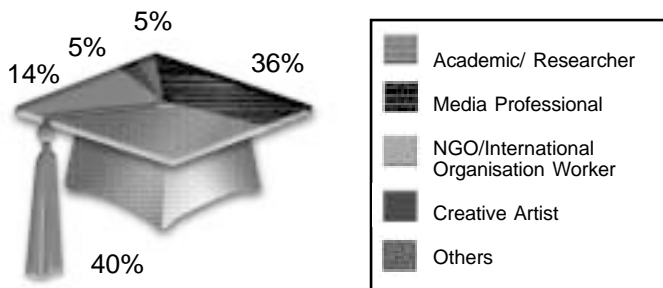
The purpose of the *Scholars of Peace* program is to help the fellows to widen their knowledge base, enhance their skills and maintain standards of professional competence. WISCOMP encourages its fellows to be actively associated with all its programs including the Roundtables, Symposia and Conflict Transformation

Workshops. In April 2002, a committee of experts reviewing the work of WISCOMP pointed out:

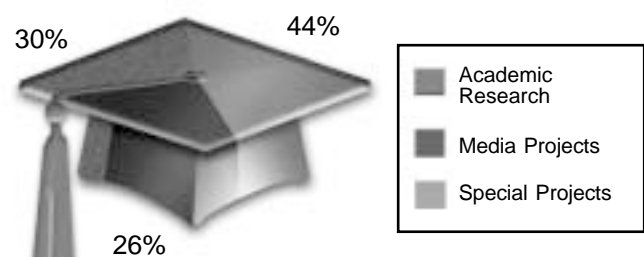
“WISCOMP may need to think of new creative ways of building up a long term connection with the fellows. Collective action could possibly help strengthen the alumni, further enhance the reputation of the programme and enable fellows to become more effective in the future.”

We, at WISCOMP, feel that this is an idea whose time has come. The fellows’ symposium of August, 2006 at New Delhi, which brought together one third of the growing body of WISCOMP fellows in an interactive dialogue, is the first small step in this direction. We hope to continue such engagement in the future, and in the process build a community of scholars, and a base of knowledge and resources, which contributes to the ethos of constructive scholarly engagement and peaceful coexistence.

WISCOMP Fellows: Professional Background



WISCOMP Fellows: Category-wise Breakup



Dialogue for Peace

(Contd. from page 5)

The group stated that the political groups in Kashmir need to address questions regarding the political and economic systems that the conflict revolves around, before putting forth any demands. The group agreed that women journalists need to be trained to cover conflicts, since for the last decade and a half very few women journalists have reported from the region. However, they said that rather than holding workshops for only women, women participants should be integrated into workshops held for journalists. Some of the members of the group also expressed the opinion that theorizing and over-analyzing the conflict along dogmatic lines makes one lose touch with ground realities.

The group on **Gender and Security** did not endorse the compartmentalization of security, whether in terms of ‘traditional-non-traditional’ or ‘military-non-military’– the members strongly advocated that human needs should not be sacrificed for military needs.

The group on **Gender and Peacebuilding: Space for Creative Expression** consisted of fellows who have been awarded fellowships under special projects. The projects powerfully highlight the role of dramatic arts in dialogue and healing, and the confidence it generates within the self and others. The fellows reinforced their belief in performances as entry points for initiating a dialogue in any space. A message transmitted through the performing arts generates a reaction – the audience is not only entertained/excited/drawn, but responds to the message in the context of what is happening in their lives.

The symposium achieved its goal in terms of bringing together and creating a fellow’s network. This forum helped reinforce dialogue as a mechanism to elicit spontaneous responses among different epistemic communities, and across faultlines, in a manner that encourages trust-building even while acknowledging differences. The research scholars expressed their appreciation for such a meeting. They found common linkages between their various research interests and needs. They also admitted how their perceptions were enriched by critical engagement with various issues during the three days of the symposium.

Peacebuilding in Jammu and Kashmir: Foregrounding the Role of Women

Luv Puri*

"For close to 17 years – from 1972 to 1989 – Pakistan stopped making even ritualistic noises about Kashmir. That was India's historic chance to settle with the Kashmiri people and bring them closer into the Indian union."

– Ayaz Mir in *Dawn*, October 2006

This comment by a seasoned columnist from Pakistan throws enough hints for understanding the complex nature of the Kashmir issue, the origins of which have both internal and external dimensions that need to be assessed in the context of a much-loaded discourse surrounding the issue. The Kashmir conflict is generally considered a by-product of India-Pakistan relations or a cause of India-Pakistan tensions. It has been presented as a territory where two distinct nationalisms or state ideologies contest each other.

No major headway can be made in peacebuilding without assessing what threatens peace in a given situation. This is true of Jammu and Kashmir where peacebuilding exercises must take into account the systemic roots of the problem. What does peace in Jammu and Kashmir mean? What are the threats to it? These are crucial questions that need to be answered before undertaking any peacebuilding initiative.

India provided Kashmiri Muslims with the hope that their unique identity of 5000 years would find an honorable space in India's federal model. The same principle applied to Tamil Nadu which too waged a struggle for acquiring adequate safeguards within Indian nationhood. Tamil Nadu was able to find space for itself with the rise of regional parties. In Kashmir, if the saga was differently scripted, part of the blame lay with the federal government while part with the political elite of the state. The ruling party at the federal level insisted that it should either rule the state or share power with a local ally. The present phase of trouble in the Kashmir valley can be traced back to 1984 when the National Conference, a regional party, refused to share power with the Congress party, the then ruling party at the Centre. Consequently the National Conference government was removed by undemocratic means. The reinstatement of the National Conference after it agreed to share power in 1986 re-established synonymy of loyalty to

the government of India with loyalty to India. It was in sharp contrast to the rest of the country where opposition parties rule at the state level without being suspected of lacking patriotism. Kashmir, where Indian federalism had triumphed in 1947, was the place it got defeated in the 1980s.

Diversity – ethnic, religious and regional, which abounds in Jammu and Kashmir, rather than becoming an asset has become a liability in the absence of institutional and societal space required for its constructive articulation. Thus every issue in the state polarizes the people along regional or communal lines resulting in acrimonious debates. A dialogue both at the centre-state level and within the state is required for attempts to establish lasting peace. But this is easier said than done. This process cannot take place in a vacuum, without the involvement of people at the grassroots.

Assertion of gender identity can be an innovative way of transcending the diverse pulls and pressures within the state. In the absence of institutions which can bring the people of diverse ethnicities, regions and religions together on a common platform, an articulation of gender identity may bring forth a broader perspective on the prevalent problems and provide an indication of how to reconcile divergent views and identities. Till now, issues which should have rallied together the women of the state, irrespective of their religious/regional/ideological identities, have only resulted in polarizing them. This was demonstrated during the debate over the issue of Permanent Resident Bill mooted in the J&K assembly in 2004. The bill deprived the women of the state, who are married outside the state, of the right to retain their state subject status – the most important document in the state to buy land, get employment and other privileges. No such provision is applicable to the men. An inherently regressive bill, which was strongly anti-women, rather than uniting the women

(Contd. on page 14)

* Luv Puri is currently Jammu & Kashmir Staff Reporter for *The Hindu* and participated in the WISCOMP convention on *Kashmir Women in Dialogue: Envisioning the Road Ahead in Jammu & Kashmir*. He has researched on 'Militancy to the South of Pir Panjal' and has published several papers in both international and Indian journals.

Religion, Reconciliation and Coexistence: An Inter-faith Workshop

As the world remains engaged in conflict over religious faultlines, resulting in the propagation of apocalyptic notions such as “the clash of civilizations”, it is imperative to generate a spirit of dialogue amongst religious groups and identify spaces for reconciliation and healing offered by different faith traditions. The premise of this initiative is to inculcate respect and appreciation for diversity rather than mere tolerance. The Interfaith Workshop organized by WISCOMP served to further this process.

The workshop organized on January 28 and 29, 2006, brought together women and men from Jammu and Kashmir, drawn from different religious and ethnic groups, professions, educational backgrounds and ages. Almost all of them had been touched in some way or the other by the activities of the *Athwaas* initiative of WISCOMP, and are part of a larger collective quest – to seek alternate, humane and non-violent spaces for creative expression and dialogue in the midst of active political violence.

The workshop's proceedings included sessions on traditions of healing and dialogic resources inherent in Buddhism,

Sikhism is woven around the dual axis of *shravan* (listening) and *simran* (remembering) which is similar to the Sufi idea of *samaa* and *zikra*. This commonality is geared towards the establishment of a vibrant community, yet we grapple with the question of exclusion.

– **Dr. Madan Gopal Singh**, renowned singer and faculty member, Satyawati College, Delhi, speaking on “*Ik Omkar: Exploring the Sikh Tradition of Dialogue and Healing*”



Prof. Ramesh Bijlani (extreme right), All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, making a presentation on ‘The Super Conscious Mind: An Aurobindo Perspective’

Forgiveness does not involve condoning or justifying an action, but trying to let go of pain and anguish.

An important part of the healing process is to seek forgiveness for one's deeds (not necessarily by addressing the individual to whom harm was caused). It is inherent in this process that one undertakes not to commit the same deed again. Such a practice nurtures compassion and wards off anger.

– **Dharmacharya Shantum Seth**, speaking on “*Dialogue and Healing: The Buddhist Tradition*”

Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. They encouraged participants to proactively engage with how these religions can be interpreted in order to promote better relations between people of different communities. Elaborating on the major tenets of Islam, Dr. Zafar-Islam Khan, Director of the Institute of Islamic & Arab Studies, New Delhi, highlighted that the word ‘Islam’ itself means peace or surrender to the will of Allah. It is derived from the Arabic word “silm” or “salam” meaning peace, a fundamental element enshrined in the Quran. Islam furthers the tenet of coexistence and respect for all human beings. He added that a belief in the will of Allah holds potential for reconciliation with circumstances, but should not be interpreted as resignation to adversity. Further, speaking on “*Dialogue and Healing in the Christian Tradition*,” Sister Agnes Panikulam emphasized the need to move beyond retributive justice in order to further reconciliation, healing and forgiveness. She stated that “the love of God is manifested increasingly in the behavior of a... person for whom the process of forgiveness has become part of life. Forgiveness and healing make it possible to reach

Authentic representative voices as that of Vivekananda from Hinduism and Frithjof Schuon from Islam converge on the point of the acceptance of diversity of religions, and a rejection of exoteric dogmatist and exclusivist theological claims which are behind fundamentalism.

They not only accept religious pluralism but advocate it too.

– **Dr. Hameeda Naeem**, core member of *Athwaas* and Faculty Member, Kashmir University, making a presentation during the panel discussion “*Locating spaces for dialogue: The Interfaith Matrix and the Secular Space.*”

The spiritual viewpoint, with its attendant openness and search for truth and meaning, needs to become an indelible part of peacemaking and reconciliation anywhere in the world. Women spiritual practitioners and teachers have made concerted efforts in this direction, though their potential as enablers and holders of peace is yet to be realized.

– Ms. Swati Chopra, writer and journalist, speaking on “Women and Spirituality”.

out with compassion and love, and to empower oneself and the others.”

The workshop sought to acknowledge differences among the religious traditions both at the level of philosophy and praxis, yet identify ways to continue to “search for common ground.” Dr. Yoginder Sikand, editor of the web magazine *Qalandar*, critiqued the understanding of religious communities as singular and monolithic. He foregrounded the importance of recognizing and interrogating reactionary and exclusivist understandings of religion. Drawing from his study on the practice of religion and inter-community relations in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, he added that it is important to move from a normative understanding of religion based on texts, to a people’s



From left to right: Ms. Shabnam Ashai, with Athwaas members Ms. Ezabir Ali, Ms. Neeraja Mattoo and Ms. Ashima Kaul

understanding of religion which is characterized by lived experiences and diversity. These popular understandings of religion may contain possibilities to develop alternate theologies, promote inter-faith dialogue and challenge oppression and marginalization.

The group emphasized the need to deal with antagonistic attitudes and ignorance of “the other,” and called for the integration of peace education into school curricula. The deliberations were informed by the possibilities of using religion as an instrument of peace and non-violent change.

Peacebuilding in Jammu and Kashmir: Foregrounding the Role of Women

(Contd. from page12)

of the state on a common platform became a point of division on religious lines. While there were rallies in support of the Bill in the Valley, the opposite was the case to the South of Pir Panjal.

Even in de-escalation of violence by all sides, women can play a pioneering role instead of merely being passive actors. This would be easier to implement because neither the army nor the militants have women as combatants. Women being the worst sufferers of violence in the state of Jammu and Kashmir during the last 17 years, women’s groups must moot proposals which meet women’s concerns. They should seek to evolve a consensus between all mainstream and separatist parties that as a first step, violence, in any form, against women must end.

Participation of women at the grassroots and giving them constitutional safeguards would be a key to peacebuilding efforts. This was witnessed during the last Municipal elections when 33% reservation for women was provided for in the urban bodies and a large number of women participated in the elections. In

the 2005 elections, the highest voter turn-out was recorded and there was hardly any violence, demonstrating the advantages of giving political space to women. Successful experiments which Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have witnessed with the participation of women in governance at the grassroots, have eluded rural Jammu and Kashmir. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution which pertain to grassroots bodies at the rural and urban level respectively do not apply to the state of Jammu and Kashmir due to its special status under Article 370. The state’s own *Panchayati Raj* Act now provides for reservation for women, only after pressure from social activist groups. Till recently, though 33% seats were reserved for women at the *Panchayat* level, these seats were filled by nomination by the ruling party at the state level rather than through elections, making for an undemocratic exercise. Though this retrograde provision was annulled by the J&K assembly in 2005, women’s empowerment at the grassroots remains a pipe dream in the state as all *Panchayats* have been suspended and no fresh elections have been held.

Women, clearly, have a major role in ending violence in this conflict zone and humanizing the power structure in a decentralized system.



- WISCOMP Scholar of Peace Fellow 2001 Ms. Manimala receives *The Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi Samman* from President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, on September 14, 2006.

- WISCOMP Scholar of Peace Fellow 2005 Mr. Wasbir Hussain receives the Assam Tribune Group of Newspapers' 7th *Kunjabala Devi Memorial Award* for 'investigative reporting on women issues.' The award recognized his series on Assam's Widows of Violence, written as part of his media project at WISCOMP. Kanak Sen Deka, President, Assam Sahitya Sabha handed over the award to Mr. Hussain during the Pabindra Nath Sarma and Kunjabala Devi Memorial Award ceremony on November 18, 2006 at Guwahati.



- WISCOMP Fellow Dr. A. Subramanyam Raju has joined as **Associate Professor of Political Science** at the Center for SAARC Studies, Andhra University, in September 2006.



Review

(Contd. from page 6)

provides the opportunity to reinforce the argument of Muslim men and Islam as being especially and irredeemably misogynist.

This, in turn, feeds into the tendency to identify Muslims as a 'problem' and as a community that is excluded from the 'mainstream', not due to structural factors or discrimination, but, rather, due to religion, in particular due to the influence of the ulama. The fact of widespread poverty, illiteracy and threats to their life and identity that many Muslims, including Muslim women, face, and the consequences that these have for reinforcing women's subordination and the influence of conservative religious forces are conveniently overlooked and

are generally not talked about in the 'mainstream' press as that would undermine the thesis that Muslim men, particularly the ulama, are alone responsible for all the ills of Muslim women.

At the same time, Kidwai does also point to cases of sensitive and balanced portrayal of Muslim women's issues in the case of some newspapers and television serials. On the whole, however, media portrayals of Muslim women appear to be negative and distorted, and, as Kidwai's interviews with a group of Delhi college students clearly brings out, these play a key role in reinforcing negative images of Muslims and Islam among non-Muslims.

Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
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WISCOMP UPDATE is the newsletter of Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace. WISCOMP is an initiative of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness The Dalai Lama, New Delhi. We see our role as creating the space to 'engender' an inclusive, conceptual vocabulary on issues of peace and security. WISCOMP works to facilitate the participation and leadership of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and to leverage support for this at the national, regional and international levels.

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Shri Ravindra Varma, Chairman, Gandhi Peace Foundation and FUR Trustee, passed away on the night of 9th October, 2006. A renowned Gandhian, Shri Varma greatly supported us in our endeavor of furthering non-violence and peaceful coexistence.

We deeply mourn his sudden demise, and pray for the departed. His insights will continue to guide us.



WISCOMP

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Discussion Papers

Jeff Redding, *In(Equality) Amid (Non) Plurality: The Pakistani Experience*, WISCOMP Discussion Paper 1, 2003

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Mossarat Qadeem, *Afghan Women: The Burden Bearers of the Twenty-Year War*, WISCOMP Special Project 2, 2004

Anupama Sekhar, *Mezzanine: Youth Writing Peace*, WISCOMP Special Project 3, 2004

Anurupa Roy, *Storytelling and Puppetry as Tools of Conflict Resolution: Experiences from Kashmir*, WISCOMP Special Project 4, 2006

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