

# Transforming Approaches to Conflict Resolution

By:

**Dr. V Mohini Giri**

**CHAIRPERSON, GUILD OF SERVICE**

*"If only the women of the World came together they could display such heroic non-violence as to kick away the Atom Bomb like a mere ball. If the Women of Asia wake up they will dazzle the world. My experiment in non-violence would be instantly successful if I could secure Women's help."*

Mahatma Gandhi

We are meeting at crucial point in the history of the sub-continent. Torn by communal strife, destructive tornado of fundamentalism, and blatant terrorism, the conditions of the sub-continent tear the fabric of world peace. The need of the hour is vital. The endeavor is to be made now, so that in the millennium humanity can reach the zenith of social and human progress.

The building of peace is a constructive activity. There is nothing passive about either the concept or the state of peace. From times immemorial India has been a harbinger of peace to the world. We feel that it is only within the framework of peace women's fullest potential can be realized and it is primarily the women who can usher in an era of peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a need to gather on one-platform women who are in decision-making, in order to discuss their overarching image of a culture of peace. This would include the hindrances to women's role in peace, such as family and societal violence interstate trafficking in women and children; as well as the strategies for the removal of political and social hindrances, economic empowerment and education of women.

Women have made and will continue to make significant contribution towards building a culture of peace. It has been known that women are largely responsible for nurturing positive cultural practices as alternatives to the patriarchal symbols and practices that separate people alienate on culture from another, and human beings from the natural order; in short they offer non-violence as the alternative to violence and strife.

Women focus on actions, which have a transformative potential. This is manifested in four areas:

- Cross-cultural dialogue and exchanges.
- Creativity not bound by the limits of ethnic and political differences. It brings to mind the examples of women writers who have been hounded after expressing their views through the written medium.

- Social stratification and stereotyped gender roles. Some media projections of the socially prevalent role of women as sex symbols or as weak personalities ignorant of her strength and resources; have to be changed in the new millennium.
- Positive interaction among different groups leading to social bonding and consequential non-violence.
- Conflict prevention and resolution. Paradoxically the fact that women have been away from the theatre of war gives the vital edge to her personality, to fight for the cause of conflict resolution.

A national meeting was held in New Delhi, which brought out various instruments and negotiations for peace building in South Asia. Some of the major recommendations that emerged are:

### **To International Agencies:**

- Create a network to disseminate all peace efforts at various levels -locally, nationally and internationally.
- Lobbying with international organizations and sensitization of NGOs/women's groups belonging to other countries of the world, on issues pertaining to total nuclear disarmament, the restriction of arm sales from industrialized nations, increase of aid and equitable trade to create the environment within which peace can flourish.
- Women's initiative in the international institutions should be encouraged specially for making policies regarding matters relating to peace keeping, preventive diplomacy and in all stages of peace mediation and negotiations.
- Encouragement of exchange of experiences in peace initiatives, inter country visits and peace studies.

### **To the Government:**

- Lobbying strategies should be formulated with the Government for the purpose of furthering peace and equality in the sub-continent and also for conflict resolution.
- A national policy be framed to promote secular values, and constructive nation building attitudes among the citizens and an ethos of peace by strengthening the family as the basic unit.
- Enact and enforce legislation against the perpetrators of practices and acts of violence, particularly those on women and children and give support to the efforts of NGOs and community organizations to control practices.
- Provide access to information on peace treaties and defense budgeting.
- Ensure women's participation in all international and national committees set up to deal with arm conflict, peace resolution and security matters.

- A peace bus be used to ride to peace which will ply between Delhi-Lahore and Dhaka-Calcutta consisting of women and men from both countries committed to peace.

### **To Civil Society:**

- Promote a strong network of groups and organizations working to ensure peace.
- All human rights and social organizations must campaign to awaken people to the dangers that communalism, racism, cross border conflict etc. pose to the struggle for equality and social justice.
- Equality, partnership between women and men and respect for human dignity must permeate all stages of the socialization process.

### **To Educational Institutions:**

- Ensure that all curriculum and textbooks are free of communal, racial bias, prejudice, refrain from stereotyping and propagate a culture of gender equality.
- Ensure that the culture of violence does not begin in the early years itself through toys and children's literature.
- Drawing from all spirituality and Gandhian principles to promote literature and other media that will help in developing better understanding among people different countries, races and religions, thus removing misconceptions, distressed and suspicion.

### **To the media:**

- Strong action against those indulging in printing and publishing inflammatory literature and preventing misuse of media for un-secular and anti-people purpose
- This distorted images of women and the marginalized in media communications should change. Media in most countries does not provide a balanced picture of people's diverse lives and their contribution to society in a changing world. Violent and biased media products negatively affect the relationships of people and under the ongoing trend of consumerism; people are primarily portrayed as consumers only.
- Create a forum to lobby against and educate public opinion of the negative consequences of the objectification/ commodification of the human body and psyche.

### **To the Family:**

- Emphasizing on women's role as the providers and peacemakers and both in normal and crisis situations.
- Promotion of egalitarian attitudes in the family and to promote democratic family relations in place of authoritative, male dominated family

- Values of equality, peace and justice should be included in the family. Family as unit be strengthened highlighting the values of respect, dignity and interdependence.
- The relationship within the family should be governed by the principle of justice wherein the rights and responsibilities of its individual members are properly understood and safeguarded.

In order to take our initiative to the SAARC countries we went to Dhaka were not only did we interact with the delegates of the SAARC countries but also pledged to work in our own areas towards peace? It was felt that conflicts arise only when cultural differences are not respected.

Our initiative was further carried on 6<sup>th</sup> of August, 1999 when the whole country was not only was reliving on T. V. camera's the battle field of Kargil in every home. It was in that atmosphere that the women's initiative for peace in South Asia a small group of Delhi based women activist met to share their grief and to think of ways if they could take an initiative to re-focus public attention on the critical need for peace. A statement was issued which was signed by millions of women wanting peace in the sub-continent.

The women's Peace Initiative resulted in a substantial breakthrough in the stranglehold of the prevailing atmosphere. More than 150 activists from over 45 organizations of civil society, including some from Pakistan and Bangladesh, expressed solidarity with the statement, which was released on 6<sup>th</sup> August.

This unique program was planned on 6th of August 1999. Simultaneously several such program were organized on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and peace marches were held everywhere. In Dhaka Bangladesh 400 women and men met in a rally at the Central Shahid Minar in Dhaka and expressed solidarity with the peace movement in the subcontinent.

In Kathmandu Nepal Stri Shakti organized a meeting where everyone lit candles, recited poems and sang songs for peace and non-violence.

In Pakistan also a number of events were held to mark the 6th August, Hiroshima Day, and to use the occasion to speak out for peace. In Islamabad, the citizens Peace Committee organized a silent demonstration. In Lahore, several organizations took out processions, which included a very large number of women.

In Karachi, the Pakistan Peace Coalition rallied people from various walks of life-trade unions, profession bodies, voluntary organizations, women's and youth organizations - outside the Karachi press Club, despite a ban on assembling. They demanded a halt to ongoing arms race in India and Pakistan and initiation of concrete measures for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Active participants of the Peace Coalition were the Action Committee Against Arms Race; Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy; Association of the Peoples of Asia. The demonstrators included a good number of women holding placards in English and Urdu stating. "No Nuclear Weapons. No to Nuclear War! War of Peace-Peace for All. Peace is a Human Right".

The Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia has been a spontaneous coming together of women and men in the cause of peace and non-violence. It needed no external funds or support to demonstrate the strength of ordinary people to speak out for what they believe in and what is right. But peace goes beyond cross border conflicts. It extends to the congenial environment in which women can develop her full

potential. After Beijing Plus Five nothing could underestimate women-power and the fact that the power had been dormant and suppressed. In India the five years have seen the growing awareness and assertion of women's rights. Through NGO advocacy, publications and seminars, there is an increasing awareness of the need for reservations for women in the parliament and in legislatures. But now with this kind of awareness it should only be a matter of time before reservation is a reality. Every political party in the last elections was forced to include it in the manifesto due to the strength of the public opinion. It is due to the initiative taken by women's strong voice that the Bill was introduced on the 23rd of December, 1999. We are confident that this Bill would be passed shortly.

Some more indicative changes as I see it has been the Supreme Court of India's judgment on the meaning, implications and consequences of sexual harassment at workplaces. As a fallout all organizations are to set up a committee well represented by NGO's, Counselors and lawyers to look into cases of sexual harassment. Literacy level has increased to 39.4%. All women police stations have been established. A rising number of women have opted for hitherto male bastions like the air force and the army.

When women think of themselves as creators of environment, then only is their self-esteem. This self-esteem can change the mindset that society has been steeped in for centuries. Every woman has to respect herself before anticipating respect from others. From this arises the need for gender sensitized education- and compulsory education for all- particularly the women.

A woman in a small hamlet of Dubghunta in India having suffered the tyranny and violence of a drunken husband for years one day just decided she had had enough. From there began the anti arrack movement that fanned into such a flame that the state government was forced to introduce total prohibition in 1995. This woman was no social worker, she did not even know what empowerment meant. All she realized was that she had it in her to influence other victims to act. The first step is to stop thinking of ourselves as victims but as creators of our circumstances.

In Bangladesh itself is the excellent example of the Grameen Bank-for rural micro credit. An illiterate woman wanted money to pound rice and earns a few rupees. That desire has pounded a way to a great extent economic dependence. The financial independence gave her the means to shape her life. Political education along with economic empowerment - the means to present her case and the tool to lobby for strength and finally the capability to ensure that the laws of the land don't discriminate.

In a region as closely knit as the SAARC every armed conflict will resound in the other countries either as cross border terrorism or as low intensity wars. When the cause of absence of peace is to a great extent economical, the solution must correspond. It is vital to insulate inter country cooperation from political tensions. In this context the South Asian Preferential Trade Area and South Asian Free Trade Area assumes great significance. This is the kind of cooperative effort that is likely to benefit all and have a direct impact on the people to whom the benefits accrue. This will in turn dispel doubts on interactive cooperation. Surely patriotism must be fuelled by the war against non-development and inequitable distribution of resources.

"O lord why have you not given woman the right to conquer her destiny- why does she have to wait head bowed by the roadside waiting with tired patience hoping for a miracle in the morrow" Rabindranath Tagore said this in the beginning of this millennium. The millennium has drawn to a close- today we are not waiting for a miracle, the miracle is within us.

*There shall be peace on Earth  
But not until-*

*Each child shall daily eat his fill  
Go warmly clad against the winter wind  
And learn his lessons with a tranquil mind*

*And thus released from hunger, fear and need  
Regardless of his color race or creed  
Look upwards smiling to the skies  
His faith in man  
Reflected in his eyes  
Then there shall be peace.*