“I learnt how ones’ identity changes with time, self-reflection was the best part of this workshop. I believe we can only understand others if we learn about ourselves first” JGU participant

Interfaith Peacebuilding Workshop (17 - 18 Oct 2018)

Center for Afghanistan Studies, JSIA & United Religions Initiative

Organized by: Prof. Raghav Sharma; Bilquees Daud; Subhi Dhupar & Suchith Abeyewickreme
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Executive Summary

The Centre for Afghanistan Studies (CAS), Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA) in collaboration with United Religions Initiative (URI) conducted a two-day training workshop on Interfaith Peacebuilding, on October 17-18, 2018 at O.P Jindal Global University.

The workshop aimed to reflect on identities and social manifestations of identities including identity-based conflicts and to articulate key principles of interfaith peacebuilding based on experiences of URI trainers in situations of conflict. In the workshop 16 students from JSIA, along with 10 students from the University of Delhi who also work with different NGO's in and around Delhi/NCR participated. The URI trainers, Ms. Subhi Dhupar from Delhi and Mr. Suchith Abeyewickreme from Sri Lanka, conducted engaging sessions that enabled participants to reflect on the meanings and implications of their identity and its impact on everyday lived experiences. One among the several tools used was the application of the conflict tree wherein participants drew a tree depicting their lives and wrote about certain personal aspects of their lives that influences their identities.

The workshop was able to initiate dialog on an agenda for change among youth that can lead building on their own strengths, passions and contexts. Overall, the workshop was an enriching experience for all the participants coming from different backgrounds.
Inaugural Session

Dr., Raghav Sharma, Associate professor and Director, CAS opened the workshop by giving a talk about the importance of peacebuilding and interfaith dialog among different individuals and communities in today’s complex world.

Subhi Dhupar, URI North India and Afghanistan Coordinator welcomed the participants and provided an overview on the agenda, aims and expectations of the workshop. Ms. Dhupar has been in Afghanistan and experienced the ground realities of a conflict zone. She also introduced Mr. Suchith Abeyewickreme URI Global Council Trustee and International Trainer on Peace Education from Sri Lanka who was one of the principal architects of the workshop.

At the end, Ms. Bilquees Daud, Research Associate and Assistant Director, CAS, JSIA talked about her life experiences from Afghanistan and India and how these experiences shaped and changed her identity as an individual.

Proceedings: Day I

Mapping Expectations:

Initially the trainers asked the participants about their expectations from the workshop and how would they implement what they learnt from the workshop.

Each participant expressed their views on what they expected to learn from the workshop. Some of them mentioned self-reflection is an essential tool to learn in order to improve one’s ‘personality and have a better view of the external environment. Some of them also wanted to learn how to fight against the prejudices that they have grown up with. At last, few of the participants expressed a willingness to understand the views of others, and how these views affect them.
Participants’ Qualities:

In this session the participants had to introduce themselves by stating their name along with a quality the initials of which began with the initial alphabet of their names. The aim of the session was to introduce the participants to each other and help everyone to think about themselves and their qualities. It was a very innovative way to make everyone think about their personalities and what their strengths are.

Self-Reflection Tree:

The trainers asked the participants to draw a tree with the following sections. Each section represented a segment of your life.

- **Roots** - A belief that defines you.
- **Bark** - Someone who has influenced you the most.
- **Flowers** - Your strengths.
- **Branches** - An area of interest/passion.
- **Fruits** - Difficult moments of your life, where someone discriminated against you.

Personal Beliefs:

In this session the trainers posed controversial questions to the participants and asked them to take three different stands: agree, disagree and neutral. Then each participant was asked to explain their positions and why do they subscribe to the position chosen. Some of the most important question were; should education be exclusive where people from all backgrounds are given a chance to get admission in universities and/or schools?
This session helped everyone’s to listen to different point of views and express their arguments. This was followed by an activity where participants were ascribed an identity by the trainers but they were not told what identity they had been ascribed. They had to guess it based on how other reacted to that identity. It was a great opportunity to actually see how society and people perceive each other.

The Island Game:

In this game the trainers made newspaper islands, each of which represented a fictional country and students were randomly allocated to each of these. The participants were given different scenarios with the aim of approximating how decisions are taken in actual situations of conflicts. For instance, in one situation one island is on war and surrounding islands were to respond to a situation where they were asked to decide on their respective policies on how they would respond to an influx of refugees from the island experiencing conflict. There were no borders between islands. Participants were also asked to reflect on how would they negotiate in time of conflict.

This game helped everyone realize what really happens in situations of conflict. It also showed how decisions are made in times of crisis and it helped everyone understand the role of power and how negotiation works.
Reflections on Identity:

How do you identify yourself and others?

Participants brainstormed and worked in pairs to discuss what are the most important aspects of their identities and whether their identities have been changed during their lifetime. Some believed that religion, caste or family backgrounds are the factors that shape their identity, while others mentioned that their individual identities are superior to their cultural, religious or communal identities.

This session helped to analyze individual identity, stereotypes, biases, prejudices and discrimination that individuals might unconsciously harbor towards others who might belong to a different religion, culture, region or caste.

Conclusions: Day I

The participants spoke about what they liked on the first day of the workshop and what they were their expectations from the second day. They also talked about how the activities helped them learn about themselves and how this would help them understand others.

According to them the session wherein they reflected on their identities, its metamorphosis and resultant imprint it left on their personalities and choices made in the past and possibly the present was amongst the most enriching experience of the day.

Workshop Proceedings: Day II

The second day of the workshop commenced by getting participants to unbox concepts of peace, conflict, religion and violence enabling them to approach these from a multi-faceted perspective. As trainers and trainees belonged to different religious, socio-economic and ideological backgrounds, they shared their perspectives, ideas and opinions about how religion and culture can shape one’s identity, playing the role of a divider, as well as a connector in the society.
What is Peace?

Peace can have different meanings to different people, thus, the trainers first divided the participants into different groups and asked them to define peace. Each group had different conceptions of peace that reflected some of their inner beliefs. The participants also reflected on potential pathways to attaining their vision of peace. This session demonstrated that definitions of peace varies for each one of us so it is hard to come to a consensus on what is peace and whose peace is to be considered. However, the overarching consensus among participants was that peace is the ultimate goal of entire world community.

What is Conflict?

The generic definition of conflict was identified by participants as the absence of ‘peace’ but conflict also can have many definitions. Conflict may not necessarily be a bad phenomenon as it may lead to peace. Some conflicts lead to the best decisions or lead to policy initiatives. Therefore, understanding conflict is essential to be more informed about making collective decisions that benefit everyone. This session reflected on the nature of conflicts as a means of achieving something which is not always negative but the way people conduct it could harm others. Conflicts may also lead to wars which in itself shows the different forms of conflicts in today’s world.

What is Religion?

Religion was viewed an inner-belief that plays a major role in shaping one’s identity. However, religion could just be the facet of conflict, while the real causes are neglected.
The trainers posed a question to the participants: “How does religion play role as a divider and a connector in society given that it is very value based?”. 

Subsequently the participants discussed their point of views and had a stimulating discussion on the issue. The session made everyone think that religious beliefs or identities should not be a divider and instead we need to respect the diversity and beauty of our world in which everyone can practice their beliefs.

**Student Presentations:**

Student participants from the University of Delhi shared their work done through the Delhi-based NGO's. The first of these was *Gram Swalambhi Swadeshi Swaraj Foundation* (G3S) which focuses on environmental development, women empowerment and educating underprivileged children.

The second NGO that provided insights into their work among the community was *Choti Si Khushi*, which seeks to empower women by providing them with free education along with skill-based and self-defense trainings.

*Gram Swalambi Swadeshi Swaraj Foundation* is a project run by volunteers and they focus on environmental development, empowering women in rural areas and educating underprivileged students till the primary level. The organization aims at bringing change in education and empowering women in the lower social strata’s in India through teaching them skills such as sewing. They primarily work with the poor and marginalized communities, providing them access to basic education. They aim to promote awareness concerning women’s health and try to hold workshops to teach proper menstruation procedures to them. Significantly they intend want to break social taboo associated with female menstruation.

*Chotti Si Khushi* is a project that is run by the female volunteers which focuses on women’s empowerment through education and teaching women self-defense
techniques. They aim to promote education amongst girls and break gender norms that are prevalent in Indian society. Through their intervention they hope to change mindsets at the grassroots level regarding education and its benefits.

Conclusions: Day II

On the last day the participants learnt steps towards resolving conflict through positive communication, which involves active listening and speaking. The trainers also assisted the participants to draw on the qualities they possess and how these could be potentially used to bring change in the society. It was a motivation for the participants to realize the power to be a change-maker. Furthermore, inspiring stories were shared by JSIA students and the NGO-volunteers that prompted a stimulating discussion on non-discrimination, co-existence and peace building.

Conclusion

The two-day workshop concluded with a felicitation ceremony and certificates distribution. The workshop was an enriching experience for all participants. Coming from different backgrounds the participants from Delhi University and JGU/JSIA after communicating and working together in the workshop mentioned that the workshop was a dynamic and unique experience and which provided them a platform to engage and learn from each other as well as benefit from insights provided by URI practioners. CAS–URI intend to build on their initiative and continue collaborating by building a network of young scholars and practitioners who will promote the idea of interfaith peacebuilding not only in theory but in practice be change makers in the society.
What did we learn?

“**This workshop was a great experience for me, I learnt the practicalities of ideologies, moreover, I learnt to respect all ideologies.**” JGU participant

“**Learning to know that students from Delhi university with minimal resources work with local organizations on the ground was very inspiring**” JGU participant

“**During this workshop we reflected on our inner self, then we started learning about our constructed identity, subsequently we moved on to learning others identities**” DU participant

“**Opening to strangers was very challenging to me, but this workshop made me feel confident enough to share my weakness and strengths**” DU Participant

“**We can’t judge people on their identity! Identity differs time to time**” JGU participant
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