

Promotion of a Culture of Peace and Non-violence in Communities

Education can play a pivotal role in promoting non-violence and targets for Quality education. SDG target 4.7 among several other values, aims at inculcating 'a culture of peace and non-violence' among all learners by 2030. SDG16 aims to "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

In India the new Education Policy 2020 recognises 'non-violence' as an important human value which should be integrated in the curriculum (NEP6.20, 11.8).

Across the globe there are discussions happening around how to inculcate a 'culture of peace and non-violence' among young people within

formal education systems and outside schools in neighbourhoods and communities. The conference aims to share these global learnings and prepare recommendations on strategies to develop a 'culture of peace and non-violence'.

One such initiative is the project 'Learning Non-Violence' which is collaboration between Centre for Environment Education (CEE) and Sabarmati Ashram Preservation and Memorial Trust (SAPMT). Started in 2016 in five schools of Ahmedabad, CEE has partnered with the Government of Gujarat to scale up the initiative to 110 schools where different pedagogical approaches, innovative education activities and teachers training modules are being developed to take these learnings into formal education systems.

The thematic/parallel session: Promoting a culture of Peace and non-violence in community was held at the conference with following objectives:

- To discuss forms of violence within the community and consequences.
- To discuss strategies to monitor promoting non-violence in the community.
- Explore innovative approaches to inculcate cultural harmony, tolerance, inclusivity and equity for safe and peaceful communities.



Speakers

- Dr Tridip Suhrud, Provost, CEPT University
- Dr Suman Khanna Aggrawal, Founder and President, Shanti Sahyog Centre for Nonviolence
- Mr Ajay Govind, Director, Words Rhythm Images
- Ms Nupur Sinha, Director, Centre for Social Justice
- Prof Karnam Pushpanadham, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda



Presentations and Key Messages

Dr Suman Khanna Aggrawal (Shanti Sahyog Centre for Nonviolence) with reference to her book “The Science of Peace” as a very practical guide on Gandhian thoughts and concepts as a holistic approach in the current context, she mentioned:

- *Political legitimisation of non-violent conflict resolution:* We are spending only \$3.4 million per minute teaching how to use violence to resolve conflict, as per the data of the global military expenditure. We are not even spending \$1 a minute teaching how to use non-violence to resolve conflict.
- *The legal democratic option for people in any democracy to be trained in non-violent defence:* Without abandoning the present military defence, a parallel non-violent defence should be instituted in every country of the world. Non-violent defence is a concrete alternative.
- *Gandhiji talks about non-violence, not as an emotion, not as a sentiment, not as a feeling, but as a science. Gandhiji calls it the law of love with scientific precision:* It is a science and has a systematic body of knowledge with its own laws and principles. There are 192 non-violent tactics that have to be learned. Any science has to be learned; the same way you have to learn non-violence, and only when you learn something adequately can you apply it properly. As Gandhiji says, non-violence can never fail; what fails is an imperfect practice of it. She discussed the relevance of Gandhian principles in today's complex and interconnected world and how to adapt and apply Gandhian principles to contemporary challenges, such as social inequality.

Mr Ajay Govind (Words Rhythm Images) shared learnings from his Malayalam children's film “Madappally,” which focused on empathy, demonstrating that students and children are willing to listen, adapt, and understand, finding solutions on their own without any violence and destruction. He discussed the importance of collective action and social change, highlighting the need for youth

leadership and civic engagement. He further emphasised that educational institutions, especially administrators and teachers, need to understand the absurdity of practices like ragging and their deep impact, and explored ways to cater to and empower young people to become agents of social change.

Ms Nupur Sinha (Centre for Social Justice) shared her experience and challenges of working with communities, including Adivasis and those in the high-conflict areas of Bongaigaon. She discussed the importance of dialogue and collaboration, highlighting the need for cross-cultural understanding, interfaith dialogue, and community-based initiatives, and the necessity to explore strategies for building bridges of communication and collaboration across diverse communities. She emphasised exploring prior relationships and the interdependence of community, stressing the need for open and honest dialogue to address difficult issues. Furthermore, she pointed to the importance of finding common ground by identifying a common enemy or evil during the dialogue so that everybody can relate to it and discuss the impact of these events on the social fabric and the challenges in fostering reconciliation. She also noted the time and space constraints for working with communities due to factors like migration, livelihood issues, and cell phones, which often necessitate working tangentially instead of going directly on the sensitisation of communities on the attributes of being a reasonable human being.

Prof Karanam Pushpanadham (Maharaja Sayajirao University), sharing his work with students and observations on unwanted behaviour within university culture, identified five social actors responsible for individual conduct: family and its dynamics; the education system, which promotes market models with competition while dropping cooperation; unequal distribution of wealth, leading to unfulfilled aspirations and violence, thus necessitating the development of individual capacities, competencies, and skills for self-reliance; politics, calling for a correction of political will and disposition in society; and society itself, advocating for the visualisation and creation of a learning community with intergenerational learning as an integral part of every society to embrace diversity (drawing on the UNESCO concept of learning cities). He further contributed to the discussion by focusing on Education for Transformation, critiquing the current education system's limitations and emphasising the need for a more holistic and transformative approach, while exploring innovative pedagogical approaches that foster creativity, collaboration, and a deeper understanding of oneself and the world.

Session Highlights

- *A Vision for the Future:* Offer a hopeful and inspiring vision for the future, emphasising the potential for positive change and the importance of collective effort.
- *Call to Action:* Issue a clear call to action for participants and stakeholders.
- *The Role of Politics and Collective Action:* Emphasise the importance of collaboration between government, civil society, and educational institutions in promoting non-violence and social change. Discuss the importance of government policies and programmes that support peacebuilding and social justice. Challenge harmful narratives and promote a more compassionate and inclusive vision for the future.
- *Justice, Equity, and Inclusivity:* Promote equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. Foster empathy, understanding, and respect for diversity. Build bridges of communication and collaboration across different communities.

- *Violence and Youth*: Promote conflict resolution skills and restorative justice practices. Address the long-term psychological and social consequences of violent practices on youth development and society.

Key Remarks from the Participants

- The discussion emphasised the need for a nuanced understanding of the local context to effectively implement the programme, exploring Bongaigaon as a place of significant conflict where its unique culture and governance system create specific complications.
- It was noted that the contrasting aspirations of parents and students often lead to parental dominance, resulting in dissatisfaction and sector transition among youth and new professionals. This highlights the need for learner/child-centred education that is not solely dependent on content delivery, but rather focuses on life aspects.
- The high cost of education was also discussed, with parents and students often prioritising return on investment, leading to most education budgets going to prime institutions rather than general government universities, which in turn contributes to the collapsing of public institutions, the public education system, and the public system itself.
- Furthermore, the relation between violence and power was addressed, observing how such violence can be very attractive to youth in society when they interact.
- Consent was identified as another important aspect missing in society, and a prime need for fostering a community with peace and non-violence.
- Lastly, the extremely complicated issue of the equation of power within higher education was highlighted, with instructional violence having become part of pedagogical experience, underscoring the need to address these forms of violence between faculty and students in society.

Key Recommendations from the Session

- Peace and non-violence aren't just abstract ideals but achievable goals that require sustained effort and commitment from individuals, communities, and society as a whole.
- Engage in collective action to address systemic challenges and create a more just and equitable society.
- Encourage further dialogue, collaboration, and action to promote peace and non-violence in society.
- Emphasise the need for a multi-faceted approach that addresses the root causes of violence in the community.

Who Acts?

- Government bodies
- Civil society organisations and development organisation at all levels: international, national and regional
- Educational institutions
- Media