



Youth, Dialogue, and Nonviolence in J&K Evolving a Process: Ethics, Principles and Method

There is no fixed pre-planned module for this experiment in nonviolence in J&K. Every meeting takes its clue from the earlier ones and together we edit our process, means and method.

Kashmiri youth are articulate. The long experience has reasons for them not to trust anyone, until and unless credentials become completely clear, without a speck of doubt. Generally it is mix of articulating their views and posing some questions to judge you, measure you; to find out your true identity, to 'which' you belong. If they find that you belong to none of the 'agencies', parties and positions in the political waters of J&K, they are ready to trust you though slowly and step-by-step. But, it is clear that the youth is in search of such non-partisan people and platform where they can speak up without fear and in trust; where they can meet with similar people from among them and from the estranged side from among them.

One has to facilitate, not the discussion or any subject, but one's own way to reaching out to their wounded hearts and thoughts. At times you reach to their thoughts through reaching their heart; and sometimes you reach out to their hearts by reaching out to their thoughts. Mostly it is a combined process. Discussions are open.

Through these meetings and dialogues, a process of nonviolence is evolving. For example, when the youth of one region, e.g. of the Valley, say that they should have dialogue with their estranged counterparts from Jammu/ Laddakh, the issue then is how to dialogue and for what. An important aspect of educating ourselves and each-other in a method of developing a dialogue is not to aim at winning a point, but to

aim at winning a person: "Do you want to win a person or a point?" There are certain other such challenges too. For example, invariably there is someone always to talk and demand to talk about "the truth". One has to handle these and such questions seriously, convincingly and with pure goodwill.

Every dialogue has a strong element of unpredictability; right from whether they will all turn up, to what questions they will have. This unpredictability has to be respected, and not reacted to. Any pre-planned detailed agenda, a pre-planned 'module' will convey that you have come with an agenda of your own. This is then a cause for suspicions in the situation in J&K.

With the development of familiarity and trust with some bright and active youths both in the Valley and in Jammu, the combined group has itself evolved an agenda in the course of series of meetings and interactions. Best part of this is that the group has highly articulate youth, both women and men. They include senior university students, writers, journalists, activists, social workers and teachers.

Background: Swaraj Peeth has been interacting and conducting dialogues on nonviolence with the youth and students individually and in groups. After several visits over 2010-11-12, meetings with all shades of people, leaders, intellectuals and the youth, studying and understanding the situation as best as we can and conducting dialogues and interactive sessions with the youth both in the Valley and in Jammu, the first interactive dialogue between an activist youth group from Jammu and activist intellectual youth group from the Valley, Srinagar, was conducted on 17th and 18th March 2012 in Srinagar. Prior to that, on 26 November 2011 an interaction with a group of fifteen youth in Srinagar was organized; and, on 12th February 2012 a similar dialogue with more than twenty senior university students, teachers and youth activists was held in Jammu., followed then by a youth dialogue in Srinagar between youth from Jammu and Srinagar on 17, 18 March 2012. This was followed up by similar one in Jammu on 15th, 16th September 2012. Prior to which, one-day meetings with youths both in Srinagar and Jammu were held on 8th and 10th September.

Recognizing that subjective perceptions and views about each other among different regions are at play in the intra-Kashmir relationships and dialogues among estranged communities and sections within communities, a consensus emerged about the need to build a primary, minimum baseline positive understanding and unbiased perceptions through dialogue in order to initiate a sustained nonviolent process.

Participants: Activists, writers, community leaders, journalists, teachers, artistes, University-level youth organizers and senior Uni.students. Any youth who is concerned, committed and willing to do her/his bit for the larger welfare and wellbeing of the people of J&K through the means and methods of nonviolence; the power of love and goodwill.

The Dialogue: These youth represent a generation which has grown up in the midst of horrific violence and violations of democratic aspirations and process; reign of terror and fear; mutual suspicion and mistrust; social estrangement and political polarization between Jammu, Kashmir Valley and Laddakh; and, among different communities within each region; and, alienation from everything that reflects and symbolises an unparalleled spiritual journey which made Kashmir into a land of unique cultural pluralism. They retain the social memories of the good, positive and the constructive against the poignant experience of the bad, negative and the destructive. They are striving for the former and for freedom from the later. What else otherwise should mean ‘swaraj’ if this is lost?

NONVIOLENCE IN DIALOGUE

Spirit of dialogue: Win a person, not a point: When people from different regions of J&K meet, particularly the youth, discordant notes are too many, borne out of divergent views of nationalism and nationhood. When the youth, particularly the radicalized lot, meet from both the sides, opposite views do surface. It would be hypocritical to ignore this fact and brush them off under the carpet. Because of a series of interactions and dialogues with them, such trust has been created that the youth holding divergent views and representing different sides of the political reality of J&K have shown equal interest in having a platform like SP for them to meet in a non-partisan mediating environment of confidence and trust. There is a motivation to understand each other and build relationship of mutuality.



Talking of differences, there are many. One group call themselves Kashmiri; while those from Jammu would call themselves Indians. Kashmiri youth clarified: “we are not against India, we mean no harm to India, much less to Indians; we have some serious complaints against India”. Should people look at the other from one’s own subjective, biased view point that one holds about the other? “Is it the land of Kashmir that matters or the people of Kashmir matter?” a senior student who is

also a writer asked. A line from Swaraj Peeth’s Statement on Gandhian Initiative in J&K was read out which says “... *To us the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Laddakh matter, not just the landmass.*” Little words, a small sentence, but it spoke what was in their mind!

Jammu participants explained their fear, the fear among the Pandits and non-Muslim Kashmiri about “azadi” when the slogan of “*Nizam-e- Mustafa*” (*The Rule of the Islam*) rents the air in the Valley. The Valley counterparts wanted them to shed that fear as ‘azadi’ to them doesn’t mean Rule of the Islamic Law, but a worth while democratic freedom, which they don’t have. Jammuites could very well appreciate the value of having what their other Kashmiri brothers and sisters from the Valley don’t. .. even as little as an ordinary right to peacefully protest, voice their grievances and aspiration. They deliberated on the question of necessary conditions that should be created for

mutual assistance in freeing each other from the reign of fear from the various inside and outside sources of human insecurity. Almost all participants had personal experiences of ill and discriminatory treatment by the police even out side of J&K only because of their being Muslims from J&K.

Ikhtalaaf badme, Muhabbat Pahele” (Differences later, first love and friendship).

In spite of the back log of mental blocks and dearly held views and beliefs, participants earnestly tried to walk towards each other. It was clear to all that without preparing oneself for such a dialogue, there are all the attractive possibilities for such a cross-region meetings of aware youth degenerating into a debating match against each-other, rather than elevating it into a dialogue through which one must try to win the person and not a point.

After the necessary initial unease and doubts about each other’s views and angularities, a profounder line of unity among all was drawn when a participant from Srinagar struck a deeper cord saying: “We are children of one God. We should have no animosity and hatred towards each-other.” Very moving and meaningful couplets from Nand Rishi – Sheikh Nuruddin Wali, the saint patron of Kashmir and ones from Lalded -- Lalleshwari- - the all revered saint poet, were said and so were of great poet Alama Iqbal. In response, a participant from Jammu came up with a very appropriate slogan for the meetings “ *Ikhtalaaf badme; Muhabbat Pahele*” (Differences later; love and friendship first”.

It must also be noted that invariably there is serious and studied discussion on the role of religion; the impact and influence of modern (Western) civilization; loosening of socio-cultural fabric; disharmony among communities. Quoting Islamic teachings it was suggested that decline of spiritual religious culture and domination of what we call Western materialist culture is the root cause of corruption of thought, cultural alienation leading to conflicts and violence. When they were told how and why Mahatma Gandhi differentiated between true and false religiosity, participants felt that Mahatma Gandhi was very right in transforming the struggle for freedom from the British rule into a struggle from freedom from anti-religion Western civilization. When a participant suggested that there can not be peace in absence of religion, another one pointed out that so far Muslim community in a conflict situation is concerned, resistance not only involves religion, but an exclusivist kind of interpretation of religion is sought to be popularized, which is a hurdle in the revival of Kashmir’s spiritual journey. Participants pointed out that we must look inwards and introspect, rather than hold others responsible for what is wrong with us due to Westernization.

At times uncomfortable questions were raised by participants from both the sides; but within the environment of trust and mental-emotional comfort that was created, wise counsel came from within them itself at all such instances. Differences and opposing views then were handled by the group in a spirit of friendship and understanding. Within such a spirit a process of overcoming personal views and preferences and respecting the

views of the other could be initiated in order to find a common ground where they can stand in mutuality and cooperation.

Learning nonviolence through dialogue: Three Basic Principles of Dialogue

In the light of four fundamental questions participants faced, 3 basic principles were evolved and highlighted in the process of these dialogues.

Four questions:

Q 1: What matters: saying the truth or conveying it?

Q 2: Is it fair and right to think 'my truth' as 'the truth'?

Q 3: Is not "My Truth is The Truth" root of all conflicts and violence?

Q 4: What is the path towards truth? In Kashmir one frequently hears "truth needs to be addressed" when there are truths and not any one singular 'the truth'.

3 basic principles of dialogues:

1. '*muzakarāt banisbat bahas-o-mubaysah*'; meaning 'Samvad' instead of 'vivad' or 'harmony' instead of 'disord':
2. "Win a person, not an argument."
3. "*Ikhtalaaf badme; Muhabbat Pahele*" Differences later; love and friendship first. There is a saying with the same meaning "*Satyam vada, priyam vada*"; speak the truth but say it lovingly, handle the differences of opinion after removing the difference in mind.

Points of Consensus

- We are all children of one God. We should have no animosity or hatred.
- It is misleading to have a short sighted view on history. One must not view history in terms of developments over 10 or 20 years, but in terms of developments at least over a few centuries. History not of any one dominant stream but histories of all.
- While no one should be judgemental about the other without appreciating their genuine grievances, authentic aspirations and cultural mind set, there should be openness to listen to the others. Kashmiri- the people of the Valley and the people from Jammu and Laddakh- do not like it when they are judged by others from their subjective view point.
- Muslims of Kashmir and those of Jammu are looked upon with suspicion out side of J&K and are followed by the police and at times harassed. Rest of the people in India do not realize the sense of discrimination, insecurity and humiliation Kashmiri suffer outside of Kashmir.

- Kashmiri Muslims of the Valley do not deny that the Kashmiri Pandits were subjected to atrocities, but being engulfed totally by militancy and anti-militancy Muslims could not have provided security to them.
- Pandits and other non-Muslims do not fear 'azadi', they fear *Islamization*, the Rule of Islam, the slogans of which often rent the air of Kashmir.
- Youth must work towards facilitating the return of Kashmiri Pandits to the Valley and help create an environment of safety, security and harmony.
- Above everything else the democratic right to protest peacefully must be restored to the people of the Valley. AFSPA and such other arbitrary and overriding powers of the security forces should be periodically reviewed and removed from the areas which have become safe and there should be a proper review of Public Security Act, Disturbed Area Act and such other extra-ordinary power. Justice must be done to those whose human rights have been severely violated with impunity.

Line of Action:

- We need a platform with a vision as Nand Rishi said “one-ness of opinion, thought and vision.” That will build our strength step by step.
- It was also suggested that political and social uncertainty does not allow for big goals. We should aim at small changes, and must not repeat the mistakes done by other such efforts.
- People of Kashmir, Jammu and Laddakh speak only for themselves. We must speak up for each-other.
- We should reach out to the youth through theatre, sport events and cultural activities.
- We should have our vision statement, a U-Tube presentation, so that it is easy for many to identify with us and join the effort.
- The problem of drug abuse among the youth needs to be addressed, it was repeatedly suggested.
- The group should work for the welfare of the conflict affected women, widows and Half-widows.
- Next dialogue should be organized in Jammu, with larger and more representative participation.

Enthused by the two days of frank exchange, understanding and appreciation of the common and the uncommon, the group decided to continue such meetings with increased and more representative participation. Jammu group welcomed the idea of next meeting in Jammu in May.2012. This meeting underlined the need to organize such dialogues and interactions more frequently with increased participation and preparation.

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