road to peace
musings, ideas and thoughts

compiled by
The Red Elephant Foundation
“What if I told you that only those who fear their own ideologies use bullets to kill others’, would you realise that there is always more peace in an open mind than a stubborn one?”

- Vasanthi Swetha / A Dreamer’s Destination
 Since time immemorial, gender has always played a prominent role in relationships, whether between spouses, parents and children or the various types of in-laws. The latter especially are the reason why TRPs soar in television soaps or reality shows. How exciting it is when women in exotic silk saris, bejewelled to the hilt, emote dramatically as the spotlight catches each brilliant faux diamond on their well-endowed forms. Their multi-hued bangles tinkle with their every gesture as their dark-kohled eyes flash fire.

“How dare you give birth to a girl? Don’t you know the basic rule that the eldest has to be a son to carry on the family name? Do you want all the wealth to go to someone else in the family? Have you no scruples?”

So many sentiments line the accusations, as the ignorant woman carries on her tirade. The recipient is often a drawn-looking, younger woman, whose only crime is that she is a daughter-in-law who has given birth to a daughter. Of course, it is her fault that she does not possess a Y chromosome, and has to depend on her husband for one. Her sari is less showy for obvious reasons. She is in disgrace, and it would be considered trivial of her if she condescended to deck up like a Christmas tree. If she had done the family proud by having produced a son, she would have been idolized, her sari and jewellery would have out-shone those of all the women in the family, even if she was on the verge of retiring for the night!

THE SON RISES!

The gender discussions continue, unabated. The eldest son of the eldest son is always the cock of the hoop. He can do no wrong and the proud parents and grandparents proclaim his birth from the rooftops. He is the heir apparent, after all. All hell breaks loose if the eldest turns out to be a daughter. Daughters were treated as second-class citizens for centuries and female foeticide ran rampant till the law outlawed it. Now, all hospitals are barred from sex determination tests, but today, it has turned into a cagey affair, to be carried out in dingy rooms with dim lights. Often, these lead to abortions, if the foetus is that of a girl, even if the mother is loath to lose her baby. However, patriarchy reigns supreme, and sadly, the elder women in the family, in many cases, also collude in this criminal activity. In fact, if men could have impregnated themselves and borne babies all on their own, the race of women would have died out by now.

Gender bias begins even before the birth of a child. Blue for boys and pink for girls is the norm and baby showers have balloons and decorations of the requisite colour, with banners that proclaim the sex of the child. As the children grow, boys are given toy guns, Meccano sets, remote cars and catapults, while girls make tea in their tea sets and cuddle their dolls and teddy bears. Permit me a
little personal gloat when I say that my little granddaughter wears all the colours in the rainbow and turns away from the only doll she owns.

Parenting is a technique that has more shades than you would find in a paint box. Every parent believes that their method is supreme. Some dive into Dr. Spock’s child rearing books, others burn the midnight oil trying out every method advocated by past practitioners. Many modern parents go the way their parents went; yet others spurn the age-old methods and crawl up a treacherous path all their own.

NEVER SAY ‘NO!’

“Never say ‘No’ to your child!” proclaims one mother who has probably forgotten that she, maybe, grew up well because her parents did say ‘No’ to her. The old dictum of ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child’ had its admirers and its detractors. However, a little chastisement goes a long way, for otherwise, a child learns, very early, that he can get his own way very easily. A tantrum at the right time (or is it the wrong time?) can work wonders, especially at a toy shop thronging with curious shoppers or a crowded function where tongues wag incessantly. It can get downright embarrassing for a parent when a young fella throws himself on the floor, and screams till his face turns red, which is the signal for the said parent to promise the screamer the moon and the stars. Mission accomplished! But the impression this leaves is often ugly, and a spoilt child is no adornment anywhere. Of course, the normal explanation for this behaviour is, “Boys will be boys!” reminiscent of a certain Chief Minister who said the same thing when a few unruly young men were accused of a heinous crime.

This is not to say that girls cannot also be spoilt silly and behave as badly. I remember a certain friend of my daughter’s who was like a whirlwind. She would throw everything she found at hand around... toys, crockery, books and of course, tantrums. People were always worried when she came visiting with her parents, the typical cool couple who believed that saying ‘No’ would curb the child’s natural instincts. In fact, the child’s instincts, natural or otherwise, needed to be sternly curbed, for, as a wag put it, some smart children do not smart at the right places.

ONCE A BULLY, ALWAYS A BULLY!

It was at a party, decades ago, that I noticed this little pair of twins who were quite conspicuous by their behaviour. They were about ten, and bigger than most of the other children. Most of the children cowered away from them, afraid of getting hurt. What horrified me most was the way they spoke to the waiters, ordering them around as if they were their underlings. The other parents strove to keep their offspring away from the two bullies who seemed to have a hidden spring within them that made them naturally boisterous. I waited for the concerned parents to scold them, but they did nothing of the sort. They did not seem overly alarmed about their behaviour, and continued with their small talk, even as the young hooligans ran riot. It was all I could do to hold my tongue and tell the parents that if they did not control their children today, the world would do so, one day.

Today, the two have grown up, and are still spoilt silly, proving that kids who are not shown the path of peace and harmony at home often turn into young ruffians, losing their tempers at the slightest provocation. They desist from showing respect to their elders and peers. Their parents can refuse them nothing, and with every birthday, their demands burgeon. Today, they are both trying to hold
down jobs, but the scant respect that they reveal towards their peers, and the condescension with which they view the rest of the world, has made them unpopular, and more importantly, unemployable.

It is so vital to teach a child to live in peace. Children should be naughty and do all the normal mischievous things that all children do. But there is a definite difference between being naughty and being bad. Bullies fall into the latter category, and once a bully, always a bully. Today, all educational institutions have a strict rule against ragging, because there are bullies who flaunt the rules and cause physical and mental harm to those weaker than themselves. Can you even imagine the trauma that parents and siblings go through when their loved ones are badly hurt because some indifferent parents did not bring their children up right?

**COMPARISONS ARE ODIOUS!**

How often have we heard this said? One cardinal rule that parents should follow is never to compare siblings, or their children with the neighbour’s gifted offspring. Vipin might be the smartest boy in his class, good at everything. That does not mean that Karthik has to follow in his footsteps and be a clone. Nor do Meeta and Anjali need to tom-tom the fact that they are sisters by wearing identical clothes, unless they want to, of course. In fact, Anjali might have a flair for art, music or theatre. Let her march to the beat of her own drum. Every child hears his own music and nowhere does it say that siblings need to be exactly like one another. That would be downright dull, because every person is unique, with his or her own personality, habits, quirks and finger prints.

Allow children to grow up the way they need to grow, with a few curbs to stop them going astray, of course. Else, they will grow up with stunted personalities. There are all sorts of people who make up the world, the one reason why it is such an interesting place. As Jess Lair put it, “Children are not things to be moulded, but people to be unfolded.” What the parents put into their children is what finally makes them what they are. After all, the apple does not fall far from the tree.

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away,” said Henry David Thoreau. How significant a responsibility is this! Every parent has the gift of life within his palm. As Brook Hampton said, “Speak to your children as if they are the wisest, kindest, most beautiful and magical humans on earth, for what they believe is what they will become.”

**THINGS FALL APART**

Newspapers are filled with angst, with stories of violence and hate, of youngsters running astray, of rape, larceny, murder and mayhem. Our ancestors have always predicted a time when the world will turn topsy-turvy with crime running rampant, Kali Yuga, as they termed it. Who could have said this better than WB Yeats in ‘The Second Coming’?

“Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world;
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

Do we have a remedy to heal this malaise? Where does the medicine have to be applied for it to be most effective? How can we bring out a society filled with young people who care? The answer is simple, but putting it in place is far from easy. It lies, initially, in the hands of the parents today, in the way they bring up their offspring. As Matt Walsh says, “Parenting is the easiest thing to have an opinion on, but the hardest thing in the world to do.”

Then it moves on to the teachers who mentor them, and their peers who should be chosen with care. Gone are the days when girls were sidelined, and made to sacrifice for their brothers and male relatives. Today, girls are at the helm of almost all professions, but they have to work twice as hard to prove themselves in a world dominated by men.

LITTLE EYES WATCHING YOU

So, dear parents and teachers, remember there are little eyes watching you all the time. Teach your little ones the virtues of respect towards all, be they older or younger in age. Teach them to love one another and be gentle. Teach them not to harm others, but be friendly and helpful. Teach them that the world is a beautiful place, and that it needs to be taken care of, if it is to remain so. Teach them to show kindness to human beings, animals and birds, plants and all living beings. Teach them not to discriminate between the genders, or to look upon girls as the weaker sex. Teach boys to protect girls, and vice versa. There is no rule that says that women may not protect men, if required. As the Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

India is considered a dangerous destination for tourists because of the manner in which men behave with women here, a sad state of affairs, indeed. There are numerous cases of foreign tourists being molested and raped. The Delhi gang rape case was one of the most heinous crimes ever, and even after the rapists were convicted, there was no decrease in the number of rape cases, because the wheels of the law grind slowly. It is time that girls were given compulsory self-defence classes in school so that they could at least try and defend themselves when they are attacked.

Hence, we are back to square one. If parents could take a pledge to bring up their sons as decent young men, this could bring about a sea-change in the way people view our country. The crime rate would also fall drastically. If every son grows up with respect towards all, especially women, he will never cross the Lakshman Rekha of decency, or make the heads of his loved ones hang in shame.

Then maybe, we could hark back to the times of Abou Ben Adhem, who said to the Angel, “Write me as one that loves his fellow men” and ended up among those blest by the love of God.

As Nelson Mandela says, “No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”
“What if she came alive and told you that bullets would kill only her body, what would you do then, how would you erase the traces of her thoughts on this earth?”

- Vasanthi Swetha / A Dreamer’s Destination
DO WE HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH WORLD PEACE?

ELISA GABELLIERI

“Imagine all the people living life in peace…”
This is what John Lennon was singing in 1971 - and it doesn’t feel like much progress has been done since then. But how can we live in peace? What does each of us have to do with world’s peace? Looking at the atrocities happening in the world, the first thought goes to all those countries and populations destroyed by war. Certainly stopping those would be a first step towards achieving peace, and that’s something that suited up politicians take care of when sitting around a table discussing (read: trading) peace agreements. It might seem like the responsibility for worlds’ peace is not in our hands. But one thing John Lennon didn’t get fully right in his song is imagining a world with no countries, no religions, no possessions as a way to peace. This would erase our world’s main source of beauty - differences - making it a flat, soul-less place. Peace instead it’s about countries, religions and people of any wealth respecting each other and working together to fulfill each other’s needs, rather than oppressing and fighting one another.

Peace depends on the decisions and behaviours of individuals, which in the end form families, communities and countries. “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed” says the UNESCO constitution. As a result peace building, understood as a holistic concept, starts from each and every one of us: from how we talk to our children or our neighbours, from how we interact with colleagues and schoolmates, from how we behave on a train or in a restaurant. The world is made of single actions, and only when each and every action will embed respect for life and human dignity of each human, ‘living life in peace’ will be achieved. Stopping current wars and violences is not enough: new behavioural frameworks based on peace-building need to find their space in the human mind or we will always find new wars worth fighting both within in our families and communities and against others. Therefore, not only peace is everyone’s business, but it is everyone’s responsibility to learn and practice peace everywhere at any time.

How to learn ‘peace’
Learning peace means learning how to manage conflicts without having a conflict: in short, becoming able to listen to the other side with empathy and open-mindedness to start a dialogue based on mutual respect. Peace education, in fact, is the process of empowering individuals with the skills, attitudes and knowledge peace building relies on. By challenging the different forms of violence that dominate our society (resulting, for example, in bullying, domestic abuse and militarism), peace education fore and foremost aims at behavioural change, turning individuals into

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3 Physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, psychological violence, verbal abuse
active promoters of peace. Stressing the importance of using alternative non-violent approaches to face conflict situations, peace education relies on the development of skills like active listening, empathy and effective communication. Ultimately this will lead to the creation of communities, and, on a larger scale, of a world - that follow standards of justice and equality.

As you can imagine, when it comes to peace the learning process is more complex than the one required for most subjects included in standard curricula. Learning peace may be compared to learning how to practice a sport: it needs knowledge of the basics, targeted exercises for learning the different movements, practice, discipline and commitment. Peace is in fact a life skill, a mind-set that has to be internalised in one’s behaviour.

Through experiential and collaborative learning methodologies peace can be learned and internalised to become the standard behavioural norm, but one should be exposed to peace in the first place. And it’s in educators’ hands, whether are teachers, parents or a baby-sitters, have to demonstrate and role model peace-building, leading by example. Moreover, for behavioural change to occur two are the requirements to be met: (1) the individual must be willing to pay attention to the present moment and actions (mindfulness); and (2) the individual must be willing to and able to see and interpret his behaviours (self-awareness). Peace education in fact starts from one’s heart and mind, and educators’ job of challenging rooted mental and social schemes (based on unnoticed use of violence to solve conflicts) to sparkle change is not effortless.

**How to practice ‘peace’**

What John Lennon doesn't tell us in his song is the effort that it takes to live in peace. Once peace has been learned and is part of one’s approach to life, what are the challenges of using it everyday? Like with fashion or with new technologies, the key to success is reaching a critical mass of adopters. Living in peace and being peace-builders throughout our lives is much easier when we’re surrounded by people who adopt the same non-violent, constructive attitude. But it’s when dealing with violent responses and conflicts that we risk to stumble and unlearn peace, making it fall through the cracks. The solution is transforming transform each and every situation in an opportunity to promote and teach peace to others. Somehow peace education is like the advertising of the new iPhone: it will grab attention of those who are already interested in smartphones, but it’s word-of-mouth that will ultimately determine its reach. Whether it’s in the office, at home, in a restaurant, at school or at the market - every situation should be used to practice and showcase the power of peace, regardless of how difficult our audience is. Only then we will become peace-builders and, over time, living and promoting peace will be easier for everyone.

Therefore, formal peace education only represents that fundamental starting kick to confront the intrinsic violence of our society and enlarge the pool of peace builders, but it’s through living peace in every sphere of our lives that world’s peace will be achieved. You might say I’m a dreamer, but I imagine a society where one day peace education won’t be needed anymore because respect for life and human dignity of all humans will be intrinsic in all behaviours.

**After reading this article:**

1. We hope that next time someone skips the line while you’re waiting for your morning coffee you will not get angry, ask the reason and then open up a dialog based on mutual respect
2. We hope that you’ll browse through our library of content related to Peace to learn more about how to become a peace builder in your daily life

3. If you are an educator (teacher, parent, baby-sitter, older sibling or anything else), we hope you’ll drop us a note to know more about how to teach peace - we’ll be happy to share with you our contents!
“What if everytime we teach children to spell peace, we take one letter at a time to tell ourselves that we will create a world for them to not doubt its meaning when they grow up?”

- Vasanthiswetha / A Dreamer’s Destination
A MESSAGE TO EDUCATORS/TEACHERS ON INTERNATIONAL PEACE DAY

LEA GABAY

I am writing to you because I am at a loss. I feel as though most of the news articles that I read every day are laden with details of tragedies as a result of war, violence, or hate—and the list goes on. Why do we keep fighting each other? To what end? What have we achieved by hurting others because they are different from us? Are we so inoculated with ideas of who is entitled to living in a certain environment based on specific criteria that we vehemently attack those who are different from us in order to assert our power? What will it take to change this situation? Unfortunately, History has taught us that we tend to repeat the same mistakes. We may well utter the words “Never Again”, promising to fight evil wherever it lurks; but, how committed are we to truly stopping the spread of hatred once it rears again its ugly head?

It seems as though the last few years have brought about even more polarization and divide between various communities, which has resulted in extremist views becoming increasingly more commonplace. While these views have always existed, changes in societies over time thanks to factors such as immigration, travel, exposure to different perspectives, and the creation of social movements, have caused a shift in our attitudes and ways of understanding diversity. Sadly, with the recent rise of populist and extremist groups that are appealing to the masses, particularly the youth, through social media, we are seeing a resurgence of prejudiced and xenophobic views. Indeed, these groups espouse the belief that they must preserve their identity in order to survive, resorting to violence to impose their views.

One question that we often ask ourselves is: What draws a person to these ideologies and, by extension, these groups? The reasons that are given can range from seeking a community and a sense of belonging to a group to exploring one’s identities to rejecting mainstream societies because one could not identify with the views, behaviors, and values expected from individuals from those societies.

So, what is the solution? The most common answer to that is education. If you are educated, you cannot possibly hate, right? Wrong! There are examples of people who are highly educated, but who still hold hateful or stereotypical views of individuals who are different from them. Yes, education is undeniably important. However, the question we should be asking ourselves is what kind of education students are receiving. Instead of solely focusing on teaching the content of the curriculum, we as teachers—and myself included—

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need to dedicate time to addressing tolerance and diversity in the classroom. There are several ways of fostering acceptance and building bridges across cultures. Here are some examples that I thought of and have attempted to implement in my classes:

1) Discuss the importance of creating a community and a safe space where students can feel at ease being themselves. Establish rules about respectful behavior and enforce them. Address any kind of behavior that is hurtful/discriminatory either through a class discussion or lesson plan. There are a variety of resources online on teaching tolerance and social justice in the classroom. Here are some links for ideas:

   https://www.tolerance.org/
   http://www.teachingforchange.org/
   https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/social-justice-resources/
   https://www.globalonenessproject.org/library?load=15&page=1

2) Be aware of the language that you use in class. Avoid generalizations: “All X are this way” or “your people” or language that is unconsciously sexist, ableist, or racist, or making assumptions about a certain community based on their religious affiliation, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic status, or ability. As teachers/educators, we are considered models for our students, so, it is incumbent on us to pay closer attention to what we say and how we act.

3) Create conversation groups where students are put into small groups of no more than 5 or 6. Designate one or two facilitators, and list topics related to diversity such as immigration, gender, different religious beliefs, or world affairs. Have students choose a topic and then, have a facilitator lead the discussion by asking questions. Ideally, the facilitators are the students themselves who were selected and trained to facilitate. As part of the training, they can learn, for example, types of questions to ask to lead a discussion and the way to manage talking time and include everyone in the conversation. The idea is for students to learn from each other and develop critical thinking skills by listening to a variety of viewpoints.

4) When discussing sensitive topics such as colonization, slavery, genocides, war, have students read stories from different perspectives, particularly the voices of those who were directly affected by those tragedies. Show that there is more than one perspective to a particular event. In so doing, students will develop a greater understanding of what occurred and view this event from various lenses. To make it more relevant to the students, have them participate in a project and do research on their ancestry or a topic that resonates with them.

5) Encourage group work and collaborative projects. This will help students to feel a sense of belonging. Moreover, having students work together and learn from each other can be a
powerful tool to stem prejudice and stereotyping, for they are dependent on each other to complete a project. By engaging in conversations and negotiation over different tasks to do, they become more aware of ways to interact with each other and are more familiar with each other. Human-to-human connection thus represents an effective means of countering hate.

6) Engage in intercultural exchanges with students from other countries through programs such as Global One to One (www.global1to1.org) or Postcards for Peace (www.postcardsforpeace.org) where students from different countries write letters or postcards to each other, sharing about their lives, traditions and customs from their respective cultures, and perspectives on social issues. Alternatively, students can participate in cross-cultural online projects through Global Nomads Group: gng.org/

7) Find ways of letting students express their emotions through different mediums. One possibility is using drama: Students can act in a play that tackles issues related to discrimination/intolerance or create their own and include possible solutions to combating hatred. Another option is to have students draw, paint, sketch, write stories, or use music to reflect on their experiences.

There are many more ways of promoting tolerance and peace in our communities. These ideas are just one of many. I hope that these suggestions and resources were helpful to you, and that you can harness them somehow in your classrooms and beyond. While we may sometimes feel hopeless when we consider the state of the world, it is important to remember that however small our actions may seem, they do have an impact. Let’s keep working!
“What if every war that is waged in the name of peace was reversed, how many lives would we have saved, how long would we take to understand that nothing is worth one’s life, no, not even god, for if God was a human, god would be dead by now?”

- Vasanthi Swetha / A Dreamer’s Destination
Most of us have grown up either listening to or reading stories. They form an integral part of our lives, irrespective of whether or not we realize it. For me, stories were earlier meant for the sole purpose of entertainment. But in the past few years, the equation seems to have changed.

Recently, I’ve come across a couple of initiatives that focus on using storytelling to focus on narratives of people with mental health issues, sexual violence, conflict and discrimination among others. The idea is to dismantle the stigma surrounding issues that have long been considered taboo. Storytelling is perhaps one of the best gifts of modern times to break narratives down into real-life bytes that go beyond the mere numbers that mainstream media offers. It is effective, powerful and at the same time, truthfully real.

**Humanizing the Narrative**

I don’t remember exactly when I came across the *Humans of New York* page on Facebook. Was it three years ago? Or even before? Nevertheless, I remember that it didn’t take me long to take to the page. As a person who loves reading and writing stories, I fell in love with the way Brandon Stanton created an enabling environment for people open up and talk about significant details of their lives, making it all the more impactful with beautiful images that speak volumes themselves.

In a world where leaders like Trump and Kim-Jong-Un talk about nuclear weapons and attacking each other like it is some insignificant, neighborly squabble, it has sadly become common to come across news of racism, bigotry, sexism and violence among others. But thankfully, the media still does give us silver linings.

*The Humans of New York* page currently has 18,277,973 likes on Facebook. Almost every other post on the page gets about thousands of shares, comments and reactions – arguably some of which may be a result of financial muscle backing up boosted post promotions. And yet, I can’t help but marvel at that special connect with this particular page on the new-age media platform that is able to cut across genders, ages, cultures and geographical distances.

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Nanditha believes in the “if you’re not part of the solution, then you’re part of the problem” saying. Passionate about development communication and teaching, she loves writing and is part of Tale Weavers (an educational, storytelling initiative for kids). Having worked in an MNC for a while, she realized the corporate field did not interest her and recently joined a start-up that acts as employment consultants for transpeople. Apart from reading and researching, she loves listening to instrumental music and critiquing movies. More often than not, she is called a ‘hopeless optimist’ as she believes that people are inherently good.
It goes without saying that we humans innately love stories in whatever form they are given to us – be it in books, films, plays or otherwise. What Brandon beautifully manages to do with this page, as I see it, is not just narrate stories, but give us a glimpse into the minds of people from various parts of the world to make us understand that there is a universal language that all of us do understand – love. If you are a cynic who is about to give up hope, all I would ask is for you to read one of the posts on this page and the accompanying comments. The amount of love, solidarity and affection that thousands of people are ready to shower on a random individual who’s practically a stranger to them just after reading their story is nothing short of overwhelming. It also reminds us of how important it is to merely listen to others’ stories. That in itself would enable us to start thinking more compassionately and help us be more welcoming of people who are unlike us (a concept that the current leader of the Free World struggles with, big time).

By covering a range of people’s stories – whether they’re survivors who have triumphed over trauma or are currently facing up to it in the way that they are, the page manages to bring in an angle that a lot of mainstream news imprints fail to – the human angle. These stories cut across borders and help us understand various shades of humanity. One can see that co-existence is definitely possible, if only we stop for a second to listen to those who are suffering. If nothing else, it will ensure that we never perpetuate violence in any form.

There are other platforms or avenues which do similar things as well. Khaled Hosseini’s books are still immensely popular, more than a decade after being released. The reason? For many people like me, his books gave a glimpse into what life in Afghanistan was like. I strongly believe that peace merely starts with the small step of listening to others and understanding their plight. Khaled manages to do that brilliantly with his books. His books have managed to trigger conversations about Afghanistan and its political and social climate. That, in itself, is a major win for any creative text. The mainstream media had a way of breaking Afghanistan down in its narratives – a war torn land that had no hope, and no semblance of civilization thereby warranting a western intervention. But Khaled Hosseini’s books, as like many other books that put things in perspective in Afghanistan, suggest an understanding of the grass roots.

**The journey from the unknown to the known**

I remember having a lot of prejudices and preconceived notions (mostly negative ones, I hate to admit) about specific groups of people while growing up. Whatever said and done, where we are from and what kind of people we are surrounded with while growing up has a major impact on a lot of our worldly ideas. However, a lot of my thought processes and opinions changed over a period of time – this was mostly from listening to first-hand accounts of different people talk about themselves and their lives. Being trans or asexual or queer, to name a few, were things I had no idea about and didn’t understand either. But these days, a few media outlets (though the number is negligible) are giving people a
platform to talk about their gender and sexuality which challenge stereotypes and probably inform and educate others as well.

Human beings are innately resistant to any change and we don’t generally like our thought processes or values being challenged. This resistance to change sometimes takes the form of violence and hatred in the long run. All this could easily be avoided if only we are open enough to listen to the other person’s viewpoint, show empathy and simply accept that we are all different and that it is indeed okay to be different.

With acts of extremism and hatred on the rise, it is now more important than ever to engage with people in the absence of any judgment or prejudice whatsoever. Identity is dynamic and we don’t get to define certain identities as normal while others are not. Acceptance of this seemingly simple fact will lead to empathy and peace in the long run. So remember that a single, non-judgmental conversation with a person you may not understand will go a long way in how you perceive all those who are unlike you.
“What if peace was as much as about the mind as it is about the skin and blood, would we promise our girls a society that will allow her to breathe without doubt and pepper sprays?”

- Vasanthi Swetha / A Dreamer’s Destination
The theme of World Peace Day 2017 is “Together for Peace: Respect, Safety and Dignity for All.” It is as good a time as any to look at the intersectionalities involved in protecting the environment, ensuring real gender equality and working for a peaceful society and peaceful coexistence. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) regime in place since September 2015 also puts the focus on these vital objectives front and centre in the international agenda.

The most basic human desire is for happiness and it is imperilled with the civil wars ranging, cyclones and forest fires raging and the threat of nuclear war [and Armageddon looming]. Refugees and displaced peoples are at risk and present in almost every continent. Mobilizing to ensure “respect, safety and dignity for everyone,” especially those forced to flee their homes in search of a better life in order to “transform fear into hope” as UN Secretary-General António Guterres puts it will go smoother if address the risks to peace, gender equality and the environment at the heart of this.

When women especially in at-risk communities are empowered a lot of the risks to peace, equality, environmental protection and environmental justice become reduced. As the Global Gender and Environmental Outlook (GGEO) puts it, transformational change, elimination of poverty as well as sustainable development are all possible when gender mainstreaming and gender equality is implemented and well-funded.

Just by addressing the “unpaid labour” women and girls put in at home, poverty could become a thing of the past. By funding, supporting and promoting women’s voices, leadership and agency we can boost the sustainable development agenda exponentially.

With global warming linked to civil wars raging across the planet as well as the natural disasters plaguing populations and devastating lives, the importance of protecting the environment and addressing the tipping point of climate change becomes a priority. Predictions that future wars will be fought over water make the environmental risks to the protection of this vital natural resource a priority. As has been shown in many studies women and girls are the one’s involved in bringing the family water in poor communities without access of safe water supply. Indoor air pollution and polluting kitchen fuels are affecting quality of life and impacting the economy. Both war and natural disasters are major causes of displaced populations, poverty as well as environmental devastation. Impoverished communities in such situations usually opt for cheap and available fossil fuels adding to ecological damage. Bringing sustainable livelihoods as well as clean and green energy to poverty stricken communities through women’s leaders, collectives and self-help groups could bring a fillip to the green agenda while automatically improving quality of life and bringing communities above the poverty line. A lot of much needed reform and transformation fails to take root as they are designed taking into account local realities as well as lacking adequate roles for women.

This quote by the UN Secretary-General at the UN General Assembly this week says it all,

“We cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without leveraging the power of women and building on the tremendous energy of youth”
Yet there is a lethargy and inertia in funding the empowerment of women, cleaning up the environment and supporting at-risk communities, when in fact they could be the pivot to ending poverty in our lifetime. Gender had been identified as an important variable in conflict de-escalation processes as well as environmental movements, yet gender equality at the vital international, national and regional negotiating table is still not a reality.

The feminization of all risks, i.e., women being most as risk could be the opportunity to find women led solutions to these risks. They can be the agents of change who can bring peace, protect the environment and ensure gender equality. As the UN Environment puts this, “The push for gender equality is shaping environmental understanding, but notions of gender equality are also shaped by environmental imperatives including equal access to, and sharing of, the benefits of the use and protection of ecosystems and natural resources.”

Let’s look at some concrete examples from India as how addressing the intersectionalities can ensure transformational changes. Revisiting these successful pilots could pave way for their adaption and scale-up across communities in need.

As far back as 2014, India was recognized as having the largest un-electrified population by the World Bank. Yet energy and electricity are prerequisites for economic development and gender quality. Access to sustainable energy can transform the lives of women by reducing women’s time poverty, by enabling them to pursue and broaden the options for economic activities, and by improving their quality of life. Furthermore, access to sustainable energy can help women negotiate for their strategic needs both in the household and the community.

Bringing solar energy to unelectrified communities in the Sundarbans, through micro-solar power plants the world’s largest mangrove helped reduce man-tiger conflict while enabling alternative enterprise development and handicrafts in place of foraging in the forests. Women were most benefitted by this modification of employment mode, even as the security of the community as a whole improved. This also led to eschewing of kerosene lamps and wood fires which in turn led to better quality of air and prevention of deforestation.

A CSR project of Verizon costing Rs. 75,00,000 helped bring an “Inverterless System” of solar energy technology developed in IIT Madras to 300 households in rural Telangana in the Nalgonda district. The project became functional in June 2017. Electrification that too free from fossil fuels and the grid can transform rural communities having to manage with polluting fuels to light the way. Clean energy and sustainable development going hand in hand projects such as these can empower communities in more ways than one. A region at risk from naxalism and just developing after new statehood, the state of Telangana could definitely benefit from empowered at-risk and poverty stricken communities.

Hence multi-pronged sustainable development and peacebuilding programmes that look beyond women as victims to implementing a policy of women as changemakers with an emphasis on gender mainstreaming could empower and enrich communities.
“What if one day all your enemies turn invisible, what would you do? How hard is it to do that now; to live and let live?”

- Vasanthiswetha / A Dreamer’s Destination
At an event I was invited to speak at recently, the panelists were discussing ‘How to make the world a safer place for women’. The discussion took the usual course and delineated the standard reasons why the world is an unsafe place for us. Deep rooted patriarchy was unanimously voted as the main cause. And it is that, no doubt. But after a while I found the discussion missing an important key element. I was tempted to ask a question to the audience, comprising of primarily women of all ages. “What is our role, women’s role that is, in making the world unsafe and unjust for women?”

My question was met largely with pin-drop silence. And some looks, both baffled and angry. So I had to explain the back story to my question. Recently Mark Zuckerberg had his second girl baby. And within a few hours of that news breaking out I had this joke sitting on myWhatsapp – “What would an Indian aunty’s response be to Zuckerberg, on having another girl child? ... Beta, ek try aur karlo. (Maybe you should try again for a son)”. This joke was sent to me by a woman, who no doubt found it funny. That made me cringe deep inside. When I shared this incident with the audience some of them started to get the drift. For others I had to share another example; that of Sonakshi Sinha, a famous actress, who once said in an interview that one of the happiest days of her life was when her father told her that she isn’t his daughter but his son! That a woman as successful and talented as her, holds that statement from her father as a revered yardstick of her own accomplishments, was to me, just plain sad.

We demand an equal, just and safe world for women. But how often do we review our own acts which are grossly counterproductive to that cause? When I asked the married women in the audience how many of them have sons, nearly 90% hands went up, including mine. Then I just had to drop the bomb on them. That if tomorrow our sons end up being the same patriarchal dunces that we are out to fight, who would be to blame, if not us?

My son is five. For the last two years he has been putting his soiled clothes in the laundry basket, dirty dishes in the sink, and shoes back in the cupboard. He knows where to hang his wet towel and he rarely ever asks me to get him a glass of water. Once my son is old enough he would be trained to cook, clean, do basic mending of his torn clothes and iron them. Basically, he is being trained to do most of the things I have grown up seeing hundreds of women doing for their husbands most of their living days. While my intention in training him for all this is to make him self-reliant, I realized how others might see this thanks to the following incident. A relative of mine threw this taunt at me, ‘If he does all that, what would his wife do all day?’ The relative in question is an educated career woman with a doctorate. I ignored her jibe but could very well imagine the life of her daughter-in-law as and when her son marries.

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6 Radhika Maira Tabrez is a writer and an erstwhile Learning and Development professional. Her debut novel ‘In The Light Of Darkness’ has won the Muse India – Satish Verma Young Writer Award (2016). She has also won many other national writing contests and her stories have been published in anthologies like UnBound; Sankarak, Defiant Dreams, When They Spoke and Mock, Stock and Quarrel. She lives in Dhaka with her five-year-old son and husband. She is an active member of the Kalam Library Project. She blogs at https://radhikamairatabrez.wordpress.com/
It is easy to blame men for most of the atrocities women face in the world. Of course, men are the culprits and they should be called out for it. But what about the women who raise these men to believe that they can get away with anything, just because they were lucky enough to be blessed with a Y chromosome. I have seen enough and more friends lamenting the insensitiveness of their husbands while raising their sons to be the same if not worse versions of the male chauvinists they so hate. They hardwire their daughters into being a docile domesticated animal, the very same thing that their mothers made them and they claim to despise.

The Feminist Cause is a fight for equality. When two different segments of society do not enjoy equal status, it is because one segment usurps more than its share. But also because the other relin- quishes its share too easily. I understand this fight was a tough one for women a few generations before ours. Our mothers and grandmothers did not enjoy the freedoms and privileges we have. Most importantly, an increasing number of us have access to education now, which is fast becoming the most useful weapon in our fight to equality. But what good are these weapons if we do not use them to create a better future? We fight the men of today, for the injustices they mete out to us in the name of customs and tradition. But if we don’t teach the men of tomorrow - that is, the men we are raising - to question these traditions and strive to break away from the shackles of these customs then what good is this fight?

So let’s raise our sons to be the men we lament the absence of in this world. Men who respect and value women. Who are willing to share this world, its resources and opportunities with women as their equals. Men who understand that their strength and stature does not depend on demeaning and de-powering women. Let’s raise them to be brothers who can question their parents as to why their sister cannot have the same educational opportunities as them. Let’s raise them to be husbands who support their wives when they chose to pursue a career, by shouldering child-raising responsibilities equally. Let’s raise them to be fathers who would further raise their daughters to be free-thinkers and dreamers.

And that is the real contribution our cause needs from us women.
“What if we had transparent skin, would we still be so bothered about race, ethnicity, language, food, sex, gender and rip apart the beauty in diversity or would we learn to just watch hearts beat in unison?”

- Vasanthi Swetha / A Dreamer’s Destination
I was in a room full of women of different nationalities, different races, different cultures, speaking different languages but fighting for a common goal - Gender Equality. But is it fair to view them all as a monolithic group, a sea of faces? Women’s experiences and responses are both contextual and shifting. Be it the oppression they face or the ways in which they choose to fight it back, there are several layers that overlap and intersect thus, resulting in different pathways and inroads to fighting gender inequality. In other words, social identities such as class, caste, race, religion and ethnicity are social influencers when interspersed with gender determine the varying levels and intensity of oppression experienced by women. And the decoding of this maze is not possible unless we put on our intersectional lens.

**What is intersectionality?**

Class, race, caste, religion, ethnicity and sexuality often create power hierarchy and reinforce a discriminatory system that divides the society into two groups - dominant and marginalized or the minority group. Every social identity brings with it multiple privileges and multiple struggles. While people belonging to the dominant group have certain privileges, the absence of the same set of privileges for the marginalized groups make their experience of struggle/discrimination different.

Let us take the example of ‘caste’ in India. Caste is a social construct where individuals born into a particular caste inherit the profession and social status. One can say that privilege in case of caste is inherited. It is a widely known fact that for years, Dalits and lower caste communities have faced discrimination at various levels. Access to basic rights such as education, public and health services have always been a challenge that Dalits, especially Dalit women continue to face till date. While at one level a Dalit woman faces the discrimination for being a woman - fighting the toxic patriarchal social order, on a different level she has to fight the hegemonic caste hierarchy that forces her to face exclusion and disenfranchisement. This in no way means women with privilege face less challenges but nature of oppression is different must be examined within the context of belonging to a particular social community.

**Intersectional approach to gender, war and peace**

Assam, Jaffna, Kashmir, Manipur - all these regions are synonymous with incessant strife and conflict. A mere mention of these regions invokes images of armed men, highly militarized spaces, grieving women and women of sorrow. While such images homogenize the experiences of women in conflict regions, an intersectional approach would however see this differently. Let us compare Kashmir and Jaffna to understand this in detail. Women in Kashmir often face violence on account of not only their gender - vulnerable as women but also their religion - antagonised and presented as the other

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7 Sharda holds a Master's in Gender, Media and Culture from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Having worked as a communications professional in the social sector, she is extremely passionate about using the digital space for empowering the society and improving citizen participation at varied levels. Her main areas of interests are human rights, gender and governance. In her free time she loves travelling and enjoys learning new languages. She co-founded and runs Tale Weavers.
on the basis of their religion. Similarly, the Tamil women in Jaffna are vulnerable as women, marginalised and excluded on the basis of their ethnicity and disenfranchised as indentured labourers. Intersectionality thus, widens the narrative to include socio-political, economical, cultural discrimination as pointed out by Kimberle Crenshaw. And this is key in implementing peacebuilding interventions and responses to address gender-based violence. An intersectional bottom-up analysis of conflict helps us avoid the usage of a one-size-fits-all approach. By acknowledging the multi-layered experiences of violence and by placing survivors as part of the solution, one can craft interventions that address specific problems and factors that contribute to gender-based violence. It creates a space for peacebuilders to analyse the various structures that perpetuate discrimination and ways in which these structures should be tackled to address the different drivers of gendered violence.

Intersectionality is a kaleidoscope of social identities where different colours and patterns symbolise the different privileges and oppressions and reinforce discrimination at multiple levels. Sexism and gender-based violence is something that most women encounter. But casteist slurs, class inequalities, racist misogyny and religious inequalities create unique experiences of struggle and oppression thus, making it important to provide for different narratives within the feminist discourse.
“What if one day boundaries disappear and all the continents merge, tongues exchange languages, bodies exchange clothes, would you still stop people when they come helpless, what would your land be? Where would it start and end? Would you learn to see that the world is everyone’s home and you may have the right to hold barricades but would you still hold on to your land watching people’s last breathes?”

- Vasanthi Swetha / A Dreamer’s Destination
MAYBE ONE DAY THERE WILL BE PEACE ON THIS ROCK THAT WE LIVE ON

SIDDHARTH SHIVA

Are you a cat person or a dog person?

I'm personally not picky. I like animals. All of them. I think that spider that stays in the corner of my bedroom is adorable. I call them Jack. I'm not good at naming things. But let's say you're a dog person. Dog people are the fussiest kind of people. They could like German Shepherds and hate Chihuahuas. They could like Shih Tzus and hate Rottweilers. Cat people to their credit are not fussy at all. Unless they see a dog. Then they make it known that they're cat people. They just have to.

Let's say you're a dog person and you like German Shepherds and you see one on the road. You're probably gonna tell the person next to you, "Hey I love German Shepherds, they're so majestic and loyal." The person next to you will probably reply, "Whatever, weirdo. I don't even know you." And you will walk away sadly.

What did the dog do though?

Nothing. Probably would be mean as heck to you. German Shepherds aren't generally the most friendly dogs. But you (and I) still probably love em. Because they're dogs. And dog people love dogs. Cat people love cats. Bug people love bugs.

It doesn’t matter if the animal in question is fat or lazy. It doesn’t matter if the animal in question is male or female. It doesn’t matter if the animal is aloof. It doesn’t matter if the animal has no distinguishable personality. You probably love them. Maybe you’d be cautious about an animal that has a reputation of biting people. But you would not hate them.

There’s a Twitter account called “We Rate Dogs (@DogRates)”. The account rates dogs on a 10-point scale. No dog has ever received a score lower than 11/10. In addition to rating dogs, they sell some merchandise. Recently, they had announced that a portion of their earnings for a period of time would go towards Planned Parenthood. They had refrained from making political statements in the past, and were surprised to find that a large number of their followers were conservative; who were made very angry by what they saw as a political gesture.

Surprise. It’s not just lily white liberals that love dogs. Conservatives love them too. So do people of color. LGBT folk. Everybody loves a good dog (and all dogs are good dogs).

All dogs are good dogs. And people love a good dog.

People though? Not all people are good people.

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8 Siddharth is an Engineering student, watersport enthusiast, metalhead and pop culture lover. He lives to see the day where everyone learns to be provocative without being hurtful. He gets mad when they’re hurtful, and writes about it online. He wishes superheroes were real, and would solve humanity’s problems, but thinks ordinary people could beat them to it if they tried. He dabbles with storytelling, songwriting, and activism when he isn’t trying to make engineering socially responsible. He believes in the power of rock music and scicomm in making the world a better place.
When I say not all people are good people, I’m not talking about who they are inside. I’m not talking about their capacity for empathy. I’m not talking about hypocrisy. I’m only talking about the effect that a person has on their fellow human beings.

People are racist. People are sexist. People are homophobic and transphobic. People hate. People kill. People rape.

Dogs don’t do these things.

People do.

Why?

Because we expect. We expect things from other people, in particular. We hold no such expectations with animals. That’s why we can love them so unconditionally. But with people, we expect.

We expect people to behave a certain way. We expect people to abide by certain habits, follow certain routines and perform certain activities. When they don’t abide by our expectations, we judge them. Eventually, these judgements become beliefs. When we share these beliefs they become ideologies. We become biased, we become bigoted, and we become afraid. We do not hold beliefs when it comes to dogs. The only people who fear dogs, to the most part, know that their fear is irrational. However, when we fear a human being, or a group of human beings, we do everything in our power to rationalize that fear.

But there’s nothing rational about fear that is rooted in judgement. There’s nothing rational about fearing somebody for defying your expectations.

I can hear the questions. What about Nazis?

Let’s talk about Nazis, or more generally, racists and bigots. These are people who have formed ideologies that revolve around fearing people for defying their expectations of what’s normal. We know their ideology. We know what they stand for, and what they stand for is actively harmful towards people. Which brings me to my initial point. Not all people are good people. I’m only talking about the effect that a person has on their fellow human beings. If you’re active aim is to harm someone who isn’t actively trying to harm you or anybody else, then you have a negative effect on the people around you, and you are quite decidedly not good.

But Nazis are pretty uncomplicated when it comes to discussions of morality. The reason I’m writing this is not to simply say Nazis are bad. You (hopefully) already know that. The reason I’m writing this is to discuss the things that we do that are wrong but fail to notice.

We judge people who score less than us. We judge people who drive cheaper vehicles than we do. We judge people who don’t dress fancy. We judge vegans. We judge Christians even as they judge us. We judge people for whom they hang out with and for whom they sleep with. We judge and judge and judge, even as we are judged, and then we judge ourselves based on how we live up to other people’s expectations.

The pursuit for status and money and a satisfying, normal public appearance that is forced upon us when we are still young is our society’s greatest failing. The need for normal. The fact that the
concept of “abnormal” exists. Its killing people. A young girl, aged 17 died when she was blocked from becoming a doctor. Elsewhere, a boy can’t afford medication to cope with his crippling depression. An artist is murdered by her 9 to 5 job that follows her home. Songs are never born, great paintings are never made. A gay man has his heart broken by his parents before any lover of his gets the chance. Poets turn to crime to feed their families.

When you expect so much for people, you commodify them and reduce them to their productivity. Their ability to earn money, or their potential to eventually earn a lot of it. But the fact is, that people feel stuff. You feel stuff. You even feel stuff for the people you expect stuff from. You may hold these expectations for what you think is their own good. That is irrelevant. The person might not be suited to meet your expectations, and pushing them to meet them would only serve to make them miserable. If they fail, you need to ask yourself. Have I tried to reduce this human being to a money machine? Is there anything that money can’t buy that makes this person happy? Because people are not what they produce. People are not their productivity.

You are not your productivity. You are not a commodity for some corporation. You aren’t a commodity to your family or your community. You are not what other people think you are. Heck, you probably aren’t even what you think you are. You are not your grades, you are not what you earn. You have value, but that value is immense and cannot be determined by your paycheck or any other “thing” with which people use as a lens to judge you. You might be an artist. Your art doesn’t have to be for anyone other than yourself. And those that hurt you, you can ignore them, you can fight them, you can live with them, you can change them. Sometimes you have a choice, but other times you don’t. Most often, you don’t. Just know this: it isn’t your fault you’re struggling. It isn’t easy to have to be somebody that you aren’t. And it definitely isn’t your fault that you have to be somebody else. We all want to make the people we love happy. Sometimes we’re forced to make the people we hate happy. Too often, this comes at the cost of our own happiness. But failing them does NOT make you less of a person and succeeding doesn’t mean you’ve sold your soul.

If you have the privilege to be whoever you want to be without having to work towards getting there? Do not let that privilege blind you to the fact that there’re those that cannot. Help people. Be good. Give as much as you can. Or at the very least do not be insensitive to their struggles, and do not judge them for not being like you.

Finally, to all you Nazis and racists and bigots and actually everyone in general: Love people. Love the people you meet who aren’t hurting you or the people around you. Love them like dog people love dogs. Without judgement and expectations. Love them like a dog seems to love people: absolutely unconditionally. You can be a 11/10 person. Just love and be loved like a dog, and maybe one day there will be peace on this rock that we live on.
“What if I told you that the human race is strange, peace here is but short episodes in between violence, how strange it is that our ears have turned deaf to tears and numb to blood?”

- Vasanthi Swetha / A Dreamer’s Destination

And when she is free, she is not free. Institutional Oppression - it’s the systematic abuse of people within a specific group, as practiced and imposed by our corrupted system and society. Gender inequality, male privilege, everyday sexism, gender norms, stigmas, and taboos - imposed and idolized by the media, advertisements, schools, government, and even by some of our friends and family members.

What is peace? I, myself, am not exactly sure. As a survivor of abuse and trauma, I sometimes still feel that I am chained. Chained to a society that continues to neglect the bio-psycho-social needs of war, trauma, and abuse survivors. We live in a society where leaders do not lead the people but dominate, abuse, and neglect. Our society stigmatizes mental illness. People are left to rot on the streets. Girls are harassed on their way to school. Rape and sexual abuse is blamed on the victim. Children are raped. Boys and girls are human trafficked. Courthouses refuse to acknowledge marital rape. Acid attack violence, a form of gender based violence, is on the rise. Women and girls continue to be forced into prostitution. Abusers can be our teachers, friends, and even family members. Our social services and welfare system do not protect the welfare of the people.

In our everyday lives, we don’t necessarily support each other. Many of us are glued to our phones and screens updating our statuses, proclaiming that we do care about social justice, while ignoring the friend who’s mind is in the waves of suicidal ideation. And when she commits suicide, it’s a shock. Alas, if someone just looked up from their phone, she would have survived the darkness.

If a friend is in some sort of mental distress - whether escaping an abusive relationship, dealing with a difficult and exhausting divorce, or stuck in the depths of depression, we distance ourselves from her. We don’t want to “get involved.” Why do we do that? She wasn’t asking for money or shelter or food - she needed people to just be there for her. We continue to believe that being there for a person means that we have to give something tangible to that person. Sometimes all you have to do is listen.

The world is not an evil place. The world is good. Abusers roam the world in their suits and ties. People are evil. In fact, we all have a darkness in us in some way. It’s human nature. However, we are also capable of rising up against the darkness and against our darkness. I have lived in this world for 20 years. Although, I’m not exactly sure how to define peace in today’s world, I think I know how

Sophia Brink is a UC Berkeley graduate, who wishes to advocate for peace, equality, and social justice in the global community. As a researcher in psychology and a survivor of domestic violence, Sophia desires to become a clinical psychologist to help women, children, and all survivors of violence heal in a positive light and better mental health intervention efforts around the world. Sophia’s passion lies in research - to discover the solutions to real world problems.
to achieve peace. And I know that it doesn’t just take one person, it takes all of us.

Peace is achieved when those in power recognize that they can use their power to regenerate the light. There are children and young adults across the world with dreams to inspire and create. These people need the appropriate economic structures for their health, safety, and emotional wellness to achieve their dreams. Their dreams give other children the opportunity to achieve their own dreams - it’s the light that only begins when a leader chooses to lead.

Peace is achieved when we are there for each other. “How are you?” When meant, these words can be the most powerful words spoken. A support network is crucial to every person’s survival in this world. A “like.” A “update.” A “retweet.” At the end of the day, it means nothing. Look up from your phones and tablets and computers. You say you don’t have the time but you do. We say we don’t have the time for a ten minute phone conversation but we have the time to text aimlessly for two hours. There is always time. We will all feel down. We are all struggling. Help people help you help people. Talk. Communicate. Be there for each other. Break out of the rat race.

Peace acknowledges mental health. Mental illness is stigmatized in our society. We are laughed at. We are ignored. We are beaten. We are chained. We are neglected. There’s a lack of understanding, compassion, and action. We say it’s “not real,” “crazy,” and “all in the head.” However, each mental condition and neurological disorder has biopsychosocial causes and effects. To achieve peace, we need the appropriate resources in our homes, schools, and workplaces to support our mental health. To achieve peace, we need to break the stigma.

Finally, Peace acknowledges human rights. Peace acknowledges women’s rights. Women’s rights are human rights. I cannot say this enough. We are not sweet fruit for you to devour. We are not the dough for you to knead. We are not the puppets for your hands to choke. We are not just breasts and soft skin and lips. We are not just mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives. We are human.

Everyone says, at least once in their lives, that they want world peace. If all of us want world peace, why haven’t we achieved it? We can’t save the world alone. But what we can do is save ourselves and follow a path of kindness, of compassion, of love, of justice. Because when we do so, we can save a person and that person will save a person and that person will save a person. This is how the hope of peace transpires.
“What if I told you that there cannot be better symbols of peace than the way we live, how near are we to be left with none?”

- Vasanthi Swetha / A Dreamer’s Destination
IS WORLD PEACE AN UNATTAINABLE DREAM?
VAISHNAVI PALLAPOTHU

Ever since WWII, the idea of “world peace” has become an over-glamorized and an over-romanticized idea. Numerous influential persons seem to want to advocate for this cause, sadly in an overtly generic manner, in attempt to win over the masses. Posters showing the peace symbol and people chanting or demanding peace are testimonies of vague ways to take a shot at solving the problem that is ‘world peace’. Peace has become an abstract destination when it as actually a profound journey.

Oxford dictionary defines peace as “freedom from disturbance; tranquility; a state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended”. However, I am sure most of us can agree that peace has a broader definition, encompassing a vast number of factors that vary from individual to individual. National Peace Academy segregates peace into five wide categories: personal, social, ecological, political and institutional. What this means is that, as with any other human rights related movement (such as feminism and Black Lives Matter), intersectionality must be considered. Oxford dictionary provides the following definition for intersectionality: “The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.” Peace means different things for different people. For instance, a Syrian family fleeing from war and persecution may define peace as a time when their lives are not on the line and when they have access to basic amenities without any threats looming over their shoulders. For an African-American black queer man, peace could entail not being oppressed or discriminated because of his skin colour and/or sexuality. For a Muslim woman, she may wish to achieve peace by liberating herself from Islamophobic slurs and misogyny in a largely patriarchal world. Peace does not even have to be associated with oppression on a large scale. A woman in a domestic violence-ravaged household may associate peace with freedom from abuse. Each person on this planet has a different definition for peace, be it inner peace, world peace, a white-flag truce, freedom or simply serendipity; it is up to us to carve our own connotation.

It is extremely necessary and relevant to talk about peace and harmony in today’s world – times in which people are being fuelled by hatred, violence, intolerance, bigotry, terrorism and other nasty forms of extremism. In theory, simply put, world peace is a state of amity, non-violence and overall happiness throughout the entire world. It is unrealistic to imagine the complete absence of conflict among nations or even groups of people. With the world’s population climbing steadily, there will be an increase in demand for natural resources, jobs and even power. Technology is only going to advance but hopefully a decrease in poverty and apathy will accompany it. A state of world peace could be quite a monotonous, albeit harmonious world to live in. The cold truth is that conflict is a force that will exist in both human society and nature itself. To eliminate conflict, one must

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10 Vaishnavi Pallapothu is an avid reader, writer and unabashed tv-show binge watcher. Having recently completed 12th grade, she would like to pursue biochemistry while also experimenting with teaching and social activism. Her true passion lies in traveling and learning new languages. She is a co-author on the blog In Your Face and writes articles about topics that question her worldview. She provided inputs on a book authored by Gayle Kimball (professor at university of Chicago) about Women in India.
eliminate the differences in opinions, ideologies and character of each person. Sacrificing individuality would mean loss of uniqueness. Even if that could be achieved (hypothetically), preserving that peace would be an even more difficult step. Anything that upsets it will have to be controlled or removed. There would be little to no room for dissenting opinion, controversies, freedom of expression and breaking the mold. Another problem that arises from this system is that, obviously, every person on Earth would not comply or agree to operating the same way. In a very crude sense, a world that is at peace can be achieved possibly only by a hallmark dictatorship. And of course, I strongly believe that one can truly appreciate freedom and peace only when one has experienced chaos and regime. Just like without the struggles, the good times will neither be appreciated nor noticed.

The irony is that neither governments or nations can make peace, even though they invest so much in military and global conferences. Perhaps this is because they can only limit violence and other factors which disturb peace and not eliminate them. Peace is not entirely a state of politics. The concept of peace needs to start from home. It is very easy to be influenced by the media, which portrays violence, oppression and terrorism in a hyperbolic way. Nevertheless, peace can be internalized by instilling the importance of empathy, compassion, kindness and helpfulness in to the minds of our youth. Teaching not only our young ones, but also everyone we can find to be open-minded, thoughtful, kind and not judgmental can go a long, long way in changing the mindsets of upcoming generations. Even though, the future may seem bleak today, I firmly believe that the world is better off now than it was decades ago. Until 60 odd years ago, black people were not even allowed their constitutional right to vote. It was only in the early 20th century that women were allowed to vote. And today? We have plenty of countries accepting refugees fleeing from war and dictatorship. We have many countries giving rights to the LGBTQ+ community. There are countless organizations, non-profits and NGOs (such as Peace Direct and Art of Living) that are making strides in improving people’s lives. We have impassioned activists, social workers, leaders and changemakers actively fighting and winning for human rights. We have understanding and empathetic people who accept our idiosyncrasies and differences. We are slowly beginning to have diverse representation in the television field. Creativity is peaking, with more and more artists, poets, writers, actors and dreamers in the making. Most of all, we have YOU for being you and contributing to the world as little as you may. All of these aforementioned things may seem totally irrelevant to bringing ‘peace’ but as I previously explored – peace is comprised of many smaller fragments. If we can actively better ourselves and change the mindsets of others too, we can get closer to achieving the intangible destination that is world peace. Maybe one person cannot change the world, but we can aim to change the world for at least one person.

Yes, this century will be riddled with famine, war, climate change, poverty, terrorism and injustice. But it is also a great time to be alive, when the world economy is growing larger and more and more countries are committing to its people, its power to a valiant mission: a world that is largely at peace, with ample education, opportunities, freedom, rights and prosperity for everyone. A world with plenty of love and compassion to give and receive. That for me, is the definition of world peace.

Sources:
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2. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/peace
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“What if I told you to open a few curtains and see how many of them are busy being made to justify the word feminism than being busy to find the justice that the movement seeks, would you tell me how easily we digress and distract peace from violence?”

- Vasanthi Swetha / A Dreamer’s Destination
Our understandings of peace range from the mere absence of war to one where there is harmony and friendship between parties. Understanding peace in the broadest context leaves scope for peace to be seen as something a person experiences internally, peace in interpersonal relationships and peace between diplomatic/governmental entities.

Law has often been used as a tool for protecting and maintaining peace, both domestically and internationally. Internationally, the law provides for protection against aggressor nations, albeit the effectiveness of such law is yet to be tested. It also provides for peace from human strife, support for those in sub human living conditions, for those facing persecution, etc. Domestically, law provides for prevention of internal war as well as human strife of citizens within the borders of the respective nation. Working on these verticals helps build peace amongst individuals and societies.

Further, rule of law restricts the arbitrary exercise of power by subordinating it to well-defined and established laws. The rule of law establishes (is ideally supposed to establish) justice in a society. Muna Ndulo states that in today’s world, nations from virtually every region recognize that the rule of law and the protection of human rights are critical factors in nation-building and good governance. Such recognition weaves in these aspects into the law of the land, towards building peace.

Law has been used internationally to build agreements that deter war, promote cooperation and non violence between nations - towards developing international peace and security. Correspondingly, these laws are also used to ensure that parties/nations are held responsible for actions that may hamper peace. But sometimes, law fails to uphold peace, both internationally and domestically. One such manner in which the law fails people is its inability, in most part, to account for gender.

The law doesn’t recognise the need for gender specificity or gender neutrality in several laws. It does not account for the varied lived experiences of different genders and corresponding protections, rights and duties required of all people. When law fails to do so, it discounts the atrocities and violence met to people of different genders. Several countries do not account for gender specific crimes, they do not account for gender related issues in economic laws, even insurance laws do not adequately represent the needs of genders other than male.

Such a gap in our laws perpetuates imbalance and discord between genders. Addressing such issues can help law create further peace, especially amongst and for different genders. For e.g., sexual

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violence in conflict zones is a widely known yet not adequately addressed issue. Such violence can be perpetuated against any gender but tends to be more focused towards children and women. While in a recent ruling, the International Criminal Court (ICC) found former Congolese vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba guilty on five charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including rape, murder and pillage - the first where the ICC focused on sexual violence as a weapon of war\textsuperscript{13}, several uses of rape and sexual violence as a war crime are ignored. According to a recent investigation by the Associated Press (AP), between 2004 and 2016, the United Nations (UN) received almost 2,000 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against its peacekeepers.\textsuperscript{14} While the UN maintains that it follows up and takes strict action, several experts state that such crimes have been allowed to be continued.

A cause for this is also the lack of institutional policy and corresponding law that enforces action against such crimes more effectively and provides for easy to use channels of communication for raising related issues. For e.g., immunity for peacekeepers and lack of accountability and transparency on part of the UN and its bodies, as built into its constitution and laws, allows for such acts to perpetuate.

Laws relating to migration policy and aid can also overlook the more specific needs of different genders, in terms of medication, clothing or even nutrition.

In India, sexual violence laws are not gender neutral. By focusing on only women as victims, it not only denotes them to being the de facto weaker sex, it creates a vacuum in the law for victims of sexual violence that are of other genders.

Frighteningly, marital rape in India continues to be listed as an exception to the act of rape in the very law. A recent Supreme Court ruling stated that, “(the) Parliament has extensively debated the issue of marital rape and considered that it was not an offence of rape. Therefore, it cannot be considered as a criminal offence.”\textsuperscript{15} This case dealt with the exception clause to the section on rape under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), allowing for marital rape of minor married girls, whereas other Indian law considers sexual relations with a girl under the age of eighteen as statutory rape. Such law takes away all rights from a victim of such an act and by legal fiction takes away autonomy and agency of the person over themselves just because of a marital relationship.

On the other hand, the Delhi High Court questioned the Centre in another case, and asked it how it can justify marital rape as an exception as under law.\textsuperscript{16} Such actions help build positive inroads towards dismantling gender biases and related violence.

There is always the question of the need to change how people think to actually bring into effect any change. Yes, while that is true, having a law to a certain effect protects the rights of those who


\textsuperscript{16} [https://thewire.in/159074/marital-rape-exception-high-court/](https://thewire.in/159074/marital-rape-exception-high-court/)
would be otherwise negatively affected, it also gives them a channel of redressal. Enacting such law by itself is a way of creating awareness and dialogue around issues related to gender, and even otherwise.

Another key aspect of law that needs looking into, in terms of gender, is access to the law and resultant justice. Women tend to be lesser educated, have lesser financial control and lesser access to technology because of patriarchal dominance. They often do not always have the resources to equip them to access the legal system. Hence, it is imperative for the law to build within itself mechanisms to address issues of access for all, especially for women and other marginalised genders.

When all genders have equitable access to the law and when the law accounts for the needs and aspirations of all genders, it helps build a society that is more just and fair, and a society that is more peaceful as it is working in harmony. If the law does not equitably serve all genders, justice cannot be met and peace cannot be achieved.
PEACE TO ALL