Gender Perspective on Education and Peace

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Wangari Muta Maathai, Kenya, Birth 1940 was awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace. Wangari Muta Maathai was born in Nyeri, Kenya, East Africa in 1940. Prof. Maathai was the first Women from East Africa to gain a doctorate. She studied Biology at Kansas and Pittsburgh before attaining her PhD from the University of Nairobi in 1971 (Anatomy) Prof. Maathai was active in the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) from 1976 to 1987 it was during this time that she was active in starting a tree planting project to help protect the environment. The Greenbelt Movement was founded by Wangari in 1977, starting with a small tree nursery in her backyard. The movement promotes sustainable livelihoods, citizen education and reforestation, involving mainly women. Millions of trees have been planted in Kenya and other African countries. Over the years, Wangari has opposed Government and others in Kenya over land-grabbing, deforestation and governance issues. In 2002, she won a landslide victory from her home constituency to become a Parliamentarian, and under the new coalition Government was appointed Assistant Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Wildlife. Wangari is internationally recognized for her persistent struggle for democracy, human rights and responsibility, and environmental conservation. She serves on the boards of several organizations.

To give peace a chance, make peace the story:

While reporting every media personality must have faith: “In every conflict, there is always something retrievable”. It is very important to popularize peace journalism. Public felicitations of persons involved in rescue operations and rehabilitation such as nurses of Cama Hospital in the midst of terrorist attack on 26-11-08 and hundreds of unsung heroes & heroines.

Popularize efforts of global, national and local networks involved in peace-making. For
example, The Thousand Cranes Peace Network is made up of groups and individuals who are willing to fold a thousand paper cranes (or as many as they can manage) as a symbol of their hope for, and commitment to, peace and non-violence. A visit to the Peace Park and the Peace Memorial Museum allows the visitor a glimpse into the horror of the world’s first use of the atomic bomb against people on 6 August 1945. It is a reminder that we must work together to make sure that such a tragedy never happens again.

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**Women as Peace Makers**

Women have built peaceful movements to fight against excesses of the dictatorial regimes in Philippines, Chile, Bangladesh, Burma, so on and so forth.

*Aung San Suu Kyi* was born on 19th June 1945 at Rangoon, capital of Burma (now Myanmar). Her father, Aung San was commander of the Burma Independence Army and was assassinated when she was two years old. Her mother, Daw Khin Kyi was appointed as Burma’s ambassador to India during 1960. Suu Kyi accompanied mother to New Delhi and studied at high school and Lady Shri Ram College in New Delhi from 1960 to 1964. Her stay in India instilled in her a deep rooted belief in Gandhian philosophy. In 1964 she left India and studied further in University of Oxford where she met her husband, Dr Michael Aris, a visiting professor at Harvard University appreciated her leadership of the pro-democracy movement in her country. Her scholarly pursuits took her in subsequent years to United Nations, Kyoto University, Japan and the institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla. In 1988, Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Myanmar to nurse her ailing mother. There the mass slaughter of protesters against the brutal rule of military General Ne Win made her to speak out against him. She began non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights. She affiliated herself with the newly formed group, the National league for Democracy. The League won more than 80% of the parliamentary seats in the elections of 1991. However, the results of the election were ignored by the military government. For six years she was placed under house arrest by military rule and offered to release her if she agrees to leave Myanmar. She was ultimately freed from the house arrest in 1995. In recognition of her non-violent struggle for the restoration democracy in Myanmar, she received several prestigious awards including Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. She also received Human Rights Prize in 1991. In 1995, India conferred the Nehru Award for International Understanding on Suu Ki.
Five Priorities for Conflict Resolution and Peace:

Practitioners involved in Conflict Resolution are unanimous in their conviction about five core principles and they are:

Dialogue, communication, networks- Centre for Studies in Society and Secularism (CSSS), Mumbai has been doing this for past two decades thro’ research, documentation, training of people of all stake groups.

Contemplation- Communalism Combat, (Hate Hurts, Harmony works) a monthly magazine provides platform for debate and discussion on political economy of conflicts and ways to resolve them:

- Community Life-Moholla Committee Movement is doing illustrious work that must be replicated everywhere.
- Justice, peace & integrity of creation in solidarity with the most vulnerable- JPCs must attract all types of professions.
- Simple living, Solidarity for Social/Economic Justice: All approaches, from A to G advocate socio-economic and gender justice.

Ela Ramesh Bhatt was born on September 7, 1933 in Ahmedabad, India. She completed her B.A. from MTB College, Surat in 1952. While in college she volunteered to work on the 1951 census. After her graduation she joined Sir L.A. Law College in Ahmedabad. In 1954 she received her Law degree and a gold medal for her outstanding work in Hindu Law. Ela R. Bhatt is widely recognized as one of the world’s most remarkable pioneers and entrepreneurial forces in grassroots development. Known as the “gentle revolutionary” she has dedicated her life to improving the lives of India’s poorest and most oppressed women workers, with Gandhian thinking as her source of guidance. In 1972, Ela Bhatt founded the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) – a trade union which has more than 1,000,000 members. Founder Chair of the Cooperative Bank of SEWA, she is also founder and chair of Sa-Dhan (the All India Association of Micro
Finance Institutions in India) and founder-chair of the Indian School of Micro-finance for Women. A former Parliament member, Ela R. Bhatt has spent her life fighting for the rights and welfare of India’s women workers. She was deeply influenced by Gandhiji, whose ideals she followed all her life. She has been the recipient of honorary doctorates from SNDT Women’s University, M.S. University, Haverford College, USA, St. Francis Xavier University, Canada and Harvard University, USA.

**Approach of Conflict Transformation:**


Shirin Ebadi (1947) received Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her efforts for democracy and human rights. She focused her efforts especially on the struggle for the rights of women and children. She is the first Iranian to have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her outspoken campaigns for human rights and democracy in her own country of Iran. Shirin Ebadi was born in the city of Hamedan, Iran in 1947. Her family was academics and practicing Muslims. Shirin Ebadi graduated from Tehran University and went onto become Iran’s first female judge, serving from 1975. However after the Islamic revolution of 1979 she was forced to resign, as women were no longer allowed to serve as judges. During a long period of unemployment Shirin wrote many books and articles on issues of human rights. In 1992 Shirin finally obtained a lawyer’s certificate enabling her to set up her own practice. She defended many victims of child abuse and murder. She has also established two non-governmental organizations in Iran, the Iranian Society for Protecting the Rights of the Child and the Centre for the Defense of Human Rights. Her work for human rights in Iran has won her admiration and respect from humanitarian bodies across the globe. However in Iran her promotion of human rights issues and politically sensitive issues has led to clashes with the conservative judiciary. In 2000 she was given a suspended jail sentence for promoting evidence that prominent conservative leaders were instigating attacks on pro-reform leaders. Besides the Nobel Peace Prize, she has won other awards as well. They are: An official Human Rights Watch Observer, 1996, the selection of ‘The Rights of the Child’ as Book of the Year by the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry and the Rafto
There are three stages of Conflict Resolution:

- **Peace building** is the process of restoring normal relations between people. It requires the reconciliation of differences, apology and forgiveness of past harm, and the establishment of a cooperative relationship between groups, replacing the adversarial or competitive relationship that used to exist. E.g. OLAKH, PUCL & SAHIYAR (Vadodara, Gujarat).

- **Peacekeeping** is the prevention or ending of violence within or between nation-states through the intervention of an outside third party that keeps the warring parties apart. Unlike peacemaking, which involves negotiating a resolution to the issues in conflict, the goal of peacekeeping is simply preventing further violence. (The UN Peace Keeping Force, UNHCR in Afghanistan).

- **Peacemaking** is the term often used to refer to negotiating the resolution of a conflict between people, groups, or nations. It goes beyond peacekeeping to actually deal with the issues in dispute, but falls short of peace building, which aims toward reconciliation and normalization of relations between ordinary people, not just the formal resolution which is written on paper. (Peace rallies, appeals, efforts throw media)

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**Women’s Contribution in Peace Building**

Through sports for peace, quiz for peace, songs for peace, debate/discussion on peace, painting for peace, theatre for peace, politics for peace, rereading history of wars & peace and interfaith dialogues the youth can be motivated towards philosophy of Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam (Whole world is my family) for Local as well as Global Harmony. The concept of vasudhaiv kutumbakam - the world is but one family - culture of peace and global citizenship should be inducted into all aspects of human life and education, especially humanities.

Let us celebrate and promote the spirit and philosophy of satyam, shivam, sundaram (Truth, Goodness, and Beauty) and live life purposefully and peacefully.

There is a need to create Peace Museums and **Peace Galleries** to help promote a better understanding of other people and cultures around the world. Organization of Peace Festivals and Peace Rallies has become a regular feature in the peace movement. In 2004, over one million people in different part of our Globe had candle light marches to stop US invasion in Iraq.

In this context, for empowering harmony at the individual and community level, liberal humanism needs to be backed by solidarity, service and authority. Educationists like us have:
To organize and mobilize men, women and children to reiterate and reinforce the importance of secular values for a harmonious coexistence.

To create pressure groups to condemn acts of violence and exclusion and to propagate actions and initiatives to promote peace and inclusion.

To reaffirm secular values and multiculturalism for maintaining and strengthening democratic values based on respect for human rights.

To encourage, facilitate and establish similar networks/coalition of citizens to promote secular values, religious tolerance, democracy and human rights and accelerate women’s participation in secular movements striving for equality and justice.

Women’s Agency in Peace Keeping

Gandhian women such as Nirmala Deshpande and Medha Patkar have galvanized hundreds of women into peace movement and have brought to the fore women’s agency in peace keeping.

Nirmala Deshpande was a noted Gandhian and a Rajya Sabha member. She is best known for her efforts to promote Gandhian ideology, eschew communal violence and usher in peace between India and Pakistan. Popularly known as ‘Didi’ to her followers, 79-year-old Deshpande, clad in white khadi saree was a familiar figure at functions at institutions connected to the Father of the Nation. Having taken a vow not to get married, Deshpande dedicated her entire life to the promotion of the work and principles of Gandhi and served the deprived and the downtrodden. Her tryst with destiny began in 1952 when she joined the Bhoodan Movement and stayed at Acharya Vinoba Bhave's Paunar Ashram at Wardha near Nagpur. She undertook 40,000 kilometers of padyatras along with Bhave to carry the message of Gram Swarajya from state to state. During the historic march, they collected thousands of acres of land donated by those who believed in Gandhiji's ideals and distributed it among poor and landless people. In eighties and nineties, she was the moving spirit behind various peace marches in Punjab and Kashmir. Her peace mission to Kashmir in 1994 and her initiative to organize Indo-Pak meet in 1996 were among major achievements in her decades of public service career. She was conferred the prestigious Rajiv Gandhi National Sadbhavana Award for promoting peace and communal harmony.
The international women’s rights movement has decided:

- To organize and mobilize men, women and children to reiterate and reinforce the importance of secular values for a harmonious coexistence.
- To create pressure groups to condemn acts of violence and exclusion and to propagate actions and initiatives to promote peace and inclusion.
- To reaffirm secular values and multiculturalism for maintaining and strengthening democratic values based on respect for human rights.
- To encourage, facilitate and establish similar networks/coalition of citizens to promote secular values, religious tolerance, democracy and human rights and accelerate women’s participation in secular movements striving for equality and justice.
- To counter violence on women, dalits, minorities, tribals and to contribute to the efforts for gender justice, social justice and distributive justice.
- To consistently raise our voices against fundamentalism and communalism and to initiate action against all forms of discrimination.

Mother Teresa (1910-1997) whose original name was Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, was born on August 26, 1910 in what is now Skopje, Macedonia. On 29th November 1928, at the age of 18, she joined the convent in Ireland and took the name Teresa. The order immediately sent her to India. A few years later, she began teaching at St Mary’s High School in Calcutta. She also served there as Principal of the school. In 1948 the Catholic Church granted her permission to leave convent and work among the poor people. In the same year she took Indian citizenship. In 1952 Mother Teresa opened the Nirmal Hriday (Pure Heart) Home for dying destitutes in Calcutta. She served the people abandoned by society and tried to help and comfort the poor. For over 45 years she helped the poor, sick, orphaned, and dying, while guiding the Missionaries of Charity’s expansion, throughout India and then in other countries.

In order to respond better to both the physical and spiritual needs of the poor, Mother Teresa founded the Missionaries of Charity Brothers in 1963, in 1976 the contemplative
branch of the Sisters, in 1979 the Contemplative Brothers, and in 1984 the Missionaries of Charity Fathers. Yet her inspiration was not limited to those with religious vocations. She formed the Co-Workers of Mother Teresa and the Sick and Suffering Co-Workers, people of many faiths and nationalities with whom she shared her spirit of prayer, simplicity, sacrifice and her apostolate of humble works of love. Mother Teresa never sought or expected recognition. Yet, she enjoyed universal acclaim as a living saint. In 1979, she won the Nobel Prize in peace for her work with the poor around the world. Her merit and devotion was recognized also by Indian government and awarded her padmashree in 1962 and also the highest honor of the country- Bharat Ratna award on 22nd March 1980. Until her death on 5th September 1997, Mother Teresa continued her work among the poorest of the poor.

Like Gandhiji’s vision, women’s vision of a harmonious society revolve around concerns such as social justice, gender justice and distributive justice. Prospects and possibilities for establishing harmony at the grassroots have increased due to multi-pronged efforts at community level, national and global efforts. Harmony for women’s rights movement is:

- Justice, Equality and Peace in the family and the world.
- Harmony at the grassroots is best promoted by those whose stakes are high: the rural poor women from Tribal, Dalit and Minority communities - discriminated thrice over by caste/ethnicity, class and gender.
- Putting women’s concerns in center will ensure development is equitable and sustainable.

Women are adept at bridging ethnic, religious, political, and cultural divides. Under mature leadership they are collaborative, inclined towards consensus and compromise. Experiences of varied memberships in mahila mandals at the village level from different castes, religions, classes come together for common goals.

“For generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls.” – UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

Women have their fingers on the pulse of the community. They are close to the roots of the conflict, have accurate information about the conflict as information givers/ evidence and play a critical role in mobilizing their communities to begin the process of reconciliation and rebuilding once hostilities end. Women are community leaders, with and without formal authority. Both the right and responsibility- drive the peace processes on the ground. Women are often at the center of non-governmental organizations, popular protests, electoral referendums, and other citizen-empowering movements whose influence has grown with the global spread of democracy. Women are highly invested in preventing, stopping, and recovering from conflict, are motivated to protect their children and ensure security for their families. Despite being victims of violence at
times of conflict, the consequences of absence of peace are most felt by them. Hence, in all conflict situations, women continue to pursue peace processes as it is expressed in the following pledge taken by women after the Gujarat Riots (2002)

“We, The Women of India, have solemnly resolved to unite our collective wisdom for the betterment of our community and ourselves. We hereby vow to strive towards bringing PEACE and TOGETHERNESS in our families and neighborhood and work towards communal harmony. To educate ourselves, our men and our children about the values of compassion, love, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, hard work, acceptance, forgiveness, sharing, respect for humanity and our environment. To raise collective voice against those indulging in suppression, oppression, exploitation, victimization and abuse of ourselves, our men and our children. To strive towards social, economic and political justice, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship and equality of status and of opportunity for ourselves, our men and our children.

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