

Healing (in) Relationship: The Theory and Practice of Inner-Outer Peacebuilding in North-Western India

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Abstract : The overall intention of this research is to reimagine peacebuilding in both in theory and practical application in light of the shortcomings and unsustainability of the current peacebuilding paradigm. These limitations are identified here as an overly rational-material approach to peacebuilding that neglects the inner dimension of peace for a fragmented rather than holistic model, and that espouses a conflict and violence-centric approach to peacebuilding. In counter, this presentation is purposed to investigate the dynamics of inner and outer peace as a holistic, complex system towards 'inner-outer' peacebuilding. This paper draws from primary research in the protracted conflict context of north-western India (Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh) as a case study. This presentation has two central aims. First, to introduce the process of inner (psycho-spiritual) peacebuilding, which has thus far been neglected by mainstream and orthodox literature. Second, to examine why inner peacebuilding is essential for realising sustainable peace on a broader scale as outer (socio-political) peace and to better understand how the inner and outer dynamics of peace relate and affect one another. To these ends, Josephine (the researcher/author/presenter) partnered with Yakjah Reconciliation and Development Network to implement a series of action-oriented workshops and retreats centred around healing, reconciliation, leadership, and personal development for the dual purpose of collaboratively generating data, theory, and insights, as well as providing the youth leaders with an experiential, transformative experience. The research team created and used a novel methodological approach called Mapping Ritual Ecologies, which draws from Participatory Action Research and Digital Ethnography to form a collaborative research model with a group of 20 youth co-researchers who are emerging youth peace leaders in Kashmir, Jammu, and Ladakh. This research found significant intra- and inter-personal shifts towards an experience of inner peace through inner peacebuilding activities. Moreover, this process of inner peacebuilding affected their families and communities through interpersonal healing and peace leadership in an inside-out process of change. These insights have generated rich insights and have supported emerging theories about the dynamics between inner and outer peace, power, justice, and collective healing. This presentation argues that the largely neglected dimension of inner (psycho-spiritual) peacebuilding is imperative for broader socio-political (outer) change. Changing structures of oppression, injustice, and violence—i.e. structures of separation—requires individual, interpersonal, and collective healing. While this presentation primarily examines and advocates for inside-out peacebuilding and social justice, it will also touch upon the effect of systems of separation on the inner condition and human experience. This research reimagines peacebuilding as a holistic inner-outer approach. This offers an alternative path forward those weaves together self-actualisation and social justice. While contextualised within north-western India with a small case study population, the findings speak also to other conflict contexts as well as our global peacebuilding and social justice milieu.

Keywords : holistic, inner peacebuilding, psycho-spiritual, systems youth

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