



Meenakshi Chhabra on Teachers' Day in India in a government school for predominantly Muslim students in Old Delhi.

WOMEN PE



BY SUSAN LADIKA

University educators, recent graduates, and current college students are striving to show that even the deepest rifts have the potential to be healed.

It may take discussion, dialogue, or counseling, but peace can come between communities and within individuals.

And understanding is essential, not only within the conflict zones themselves, but also in other parts of the world, which may be viewing the unrest from afar.

The partition of India, which divided India and Pakistan nearly 70 years ago; the genocide in Rwanda two decades ago; and the Egyptian uprising at the start of this decade are all focal points for healing.

These are the stories of four women who are working to promote peace and understanding in current and former conflict regions.

PEACEMAKERS

MEENAKSHI CHHABRA INDIA

Meenakshi Chhabra uses dialogue and personal connection to help break down barriers.

Chhabra, who grew up in India, is an associate professor in the division of interdisciplinary studies at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and also works as coordinator of the school's peace and conflict studies specialization.

India's independence from Britain in 1947 also came with the country's division. It was divided up into Muslim-dominated Pakistan in the north, and Hindu- and Sikh-dominated India in the south. More than 10 million people were uprooted by the division, including Chhabra's parents. The ensuing violence that engulfed the land killed at least 1 million people, and countless women were raped.

"The narrative and memories of conflict were always sort of alive in our homes," Chhabra recalls, and students in India were taught that the Indians were only the victims of the atrocities, not the aggressors. With the border between the two countries closed, Chhabra never had experience with Pakistanis, and had no idea what they thought or were taught.

All that changed after she got married and moved to the United States in 1995, and then started graduate school at Lesley University. By living in Massachusetts, she found herself socializing with groups of Southeast Asians and met a Pakistani for the first time.



Chhabra

She became friends with Anila Asghar, now an associate professor in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University in Montréal. Through their friendship, Chhabra quickly learned that they both had been taught the same lessons—that their sides were the victims in the violence that accompanied the partition of India.

The two wanted to puncture the stereotypes people on both sides had of the other, and as a result, in 1998 the two women started an Indian and Pakistani women's group in the Boston area to spark a dialogue between the two groups and foster understanding.

"I really felt that this would be an important experience to share with others," Chhabra says.

"Much that is used to perpetuate conflict can be used to create more connections," she adds.

In cases such as that which divided Indians and Pakistanis, Chhabra says, it's important for members of both groups to discuss their experiences and respect their differences. "We're not all the same. We can build humanity based on acknowledging those differences."

Chhabra graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science from Lady Sri Ram College at the University of Delhi in 1983. She then earned a master's degree in intercultural relations from Lesley University in 2000, followed by a doctorate in educational studies from Lesley University in 2006. She has also done postdoctoral studies in the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

She's also used her educational and practical skills outside the country, working as a Fulbright specialist in India in 2013–2014 as well as a Fulbright researcher in India in 2010–2011. She completed a Fulbright Scholar teaching fellowship in India in 2007.

Since 2001 Chhabra has directed her focus to peace and conflict studies, with a particular emphasis on education and youth development in conflict zones, especially those in South Asia.

Over the years, her role in the dialogue between Indians and Pakistanis expanded beyond the women's group, and she became involved in Seeds of Peace, which is designed to help teens from conflict regions hone their leadership and peacemaking skills.

Her first work with Seeds of Peace came in 2001, when a group of a dozen high school students from India and a dozen students from Pakistan, along with their teachers,

Meenakshi Chhabra at Delhi University with graduate students from the northeast of India



spent three weeks at camp together in the Maine woods. Chhabra's work with the program continues on today.

At the camp the two groups room together, participate in camp activities, and take part in sessions on topics such as coexistence.

By spending time together at camp, "it allows them to really see the other side in many different perspectives," Chhabra says. "It redefines who they thought the other was" and many of the students go on to be longtime friends, keeping in touch online.

In 2003 Chhabra accompanied the Indian students who had been involved in Seeds of Peace as they crossed the border to visit their counterparts in Pakistan. Those visits have continued over the years.

She has seen through working with Seeds of Peace that "they're small steps but they're very rewarding."

Chhabra says she's drawn to working with young people because of their willingness to be exposed to new ideas

and possibilities. "With kids, they are open to thinking differently when they're given the opportunity to interact and make friends."

She believes in the power of people to transform their societies. "I really believe in people power to make a shift. It might not be visible initially," but eventually it will take root.

Chhabra says she sometimes asks herself why she makes the effort to draw people together. "Maybe it will make a difference and make a difference in my own life."

"It's a work in progress. I feel grateful to have the opportunity to contribute in whatever way I can," she says, and she doesn't allow herself time to be complacent or pessimistic about the possibility of eventually attaining peace.

"I'd like to see peace in the region," she says. "I don't know if I'll see it in my lifetime, but I'll keep taking action and not sit and wait."

Meenakshi Chhabra at a government high school in New Delhi, India.



RANGIRA (BÉA) GALLIMORE

RWANDA

Rangira (Béa) Gallimore's research on a book about female survivors of the genocide in Rwanda quickly turned into an effort to directly aid the survivors after she met with them face to face.

"I could not forget the eyes of the people I saw; I could not forget some of those who lost family members," Gallimore recalls.

The Rwandan genocide is an issue that's deeply personal for Gallimore, an associate professor of French at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The native of Rwanda lost her mother, sister and three brothers, as well as extended family members in the killing spree that left an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus dead in 1994.¹

After meeting with genocide survivors, Gallimore shifted her focus from the book to the plight of women and children who survived the genocide. In 2004 she founded Step Up! American Association for Rwandan Women. The nonprofit association works to help address the economic and psychological needs of the genocide survivors and their children.

Unrest in Rwanda when she was young had sent a teenage Gallimore and her family members into exile in Congo in the 1960s. She then received a degree in French literature and education at the National University of Zaire.

She came to the United States, where she continued her education, and earned a master's degree in linguistics theory from Indiana University-Bloomington in 1982. In 1988 she earned a doctoral degree in Francophone African literature from the University of Cincinnati.

Gallimore has worked at the University of Missouri-Columbia since 1990, and while she was attending a conference in Canada in 1994, she received a telephone call that turned her world upside down. She learned that her family members had been slain in Rwanda's brutal genocide.

Just weeks later, she traveled to the war-ravaged country to try to learn more about what had happened to her family.

After that trip she stayed away from her homeland for nearly a decade, finally returning in 2003, when she was invited to speak at a conference in Rwanda on conflict in Africa. While visiting an NGO for genocide survivors as part of the research for a book, a woman told her that a book

wouldn't help solve the survivors' problems. Some of their key concerns were a lack of food and anti-AIDS medication.

That conversation propelled her to start Step Up. Initially, mental health professionals from the University of Missouri-Columbia traveled to Rwanda to help train pastors, teachers, and nurses on how to counsel those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

"Talking about genocide in general is very hard," Gallimore says. "They don't have words to express what happened. "If Rwandans don't talk about their pain and suffering, it's going to go on for centuries."

While collecting testimonies of female genocide survivors in 2006 as a fellow at the Institut de Recherches Scientifiques et Technologiques (IRST) in Butare, Rwanda, Gallimore interviewed women from ABASA, an association of women who had been raped during the conflict (ABASA means "we are all the same" or "we share the same fate" in the local language, Kinyarwanda). It was founded in 1999 after women were counseled by a nurse who was also a genocide survivor. By meeting together, the women started sharing their experiences. During the genocide, an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 women were raped, and 20,000 of them had children. In addition, two-thirds became infected with HIV after the rapes.

One of the women spoke of the trauma of not being able to provide for her children, and that's when Step Up



Gallimore

Students from Wesleyan University helping in the construction of Nsanga Counseling Center in Huye, South of Rwanda during a 2014 study abroad trip to Rwanda coordinated by Béa Gallimore. The counseling center was bought and renovated by Step Up, the nonprofit organization that Gallimore founded.





Rangira (Béa) Gallimore and her husband, Tim Gallimore, a former spokesman for the prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda, who now is associate vice president of academic planning and state authorization at the University of North Carolina, help build a counseling center for victims of the Rwandan genocide.

stepped up, providing tangible economic assistance. The organization provided ABASA with 32 cows, which could be used to generate income for the women, as well as providing milk for the women and their children. Some of the women also learned beekeeping so they could sell honey.

More recently, Step Up began providing microloans of \$100 to the women. With the money, they could buy goods to sell at the market. The loans were to be paid back within a year, but the repayment came in far quicker than that. “These women can turn stone into gold,” Gallimore says.

To help herself, as well as the women she encounters, through their emotional trauma, Gallimore completed training courses in trauma psychology from the International Center for Psychosocial Trauma at the University of Missouri.

Along with helping the women become economically empowered, Step Up has held major fundraising efforts so it could renovate a home that now serves as a counseling center for the genocide victims. The center currently is

staffed by volunteers and Gallimore hopes to eventually be able to hire counselors.

Gallimore also has given University of Missouri students an opportunity to gain insight into what happened in Rwanda by starting the university’s study abroad program to Rwanda in 2009. The program focuses on postconflict Rwanda and genocide prevention.

Each year about 12 to 15 students take part in the program. They first spend a week in Missouri preparing for the trip, then they spend four weeks in Rwanda. During the first two weeks they take part in classes and visit memorial sites, deepening their insight into what occurred in the country. The students then spend two weeks in an internship that fits with their interests. This could involve working at schools, hospitals, or social service agencies.

From the time they spend in Rwanda, the students see genocide “is not something remote that happened in Rwanda. It can happen anywhere,” Gallimore says.

Their experiences have a profound impact on the students who take part in the study abroad program, and they grapple with how to handle all that they have seen and heard when they return home from Rwanda.

As a response, one student who took part in the study abroad trip created a student organization called Step Up Mizzou. The group focuses on tutoring the children of refugees who live in Columbia, and on educating fellow students about genocide and refugee issues.

Having the organization also serves as “a way for them to vent, to get their frustrations out,” she says.

The study abroad experience has changed students’ lives, and they’ve written theses on the genocide in Rwanda, or continued on with their studies in fields such as medicine and human rights, she says.

Gallimore’s efforts also stretch far beyond the classroom and her work with NGOs. She’s also a researcher at Rwanda’s National Commission for the Fight against Genocide, and serves as a special adviser to its general secretary.

Closer to home, she has served as a consultant for UNESCO in areas such as gender equality and development, as well as on women’s rights, peace, and security. Gallimore also has worked as a consultant with the U.S. State Department on the assessment and implementation of laws against gender-based violence in Rwanda.

Among her many honors is the 2012 President’s Award for Cross-Cultural Engagement from the University of Missouri system.

Gallimore has just taken early retirement, but won’t be slowing down. She’s moving to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to be with her husband, Tim Gallimore, a former spokesman for the prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda, who now is associate vice president of academic planning and state authorization at the University of North Carolina.

She’ll continue on as professor emeritus at the University of Missouri-Columbia and will focus her efforts on her NGO work and research in Rwanda, as well as the study abroad program. Since 2014 Gallimore has been coordinating programs going to Rwanda with other U.S. universities. In June 2016 she will be in Rwanda with students from Nebraska Wesleyan University and Marquette University—and says she is “hoping to work with more universities in the future.”

Despite all she has done and continues to do, Gallimore doesn’t see herself as a peace advocate, but she knows how important it is for individuals to find peace and reconciliation. “In order to reconcile with another person, you have to reconcile with yourself.”

EMILY CRANE LINN

EGYPT

At a time when most students and tourists were staying far away from Egypt, Emily Crane couldn’t wait to spend time there.

During her freshman year at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, she watched the Egyptian revolution unfold as a part of the Arab Spring that shook the Middle East in 2011.

Although she was born in Minnesota, Crane grew up in Morocco, living there from the ages of 5 to 17. Her father first moved the family to the country to do research for his PhD and then stayed on to work on various developmental and educational projects.

“Growing up, people liked to remind me how unique my situation was,” Crane recalls. As unrest flared in the Middle East during her time at the university, she found that people would turn to her with their questions about what was happening in the region. “I found I quite liked that—helping people understand.”

That interest in helping people understand has since turned into a passion, and Crane has spent the past year in Cairo working on a book, which she hopes will serve to promote understanding between those who experienced the turmoil and Westerners who read their stories.

Crane graduated from Miami University in 2014 with a double major in journalism and anthropology. While still a student, Crane couldn’t wait to get to Cairo and immerse herself in the country. “There was so much I wanted to understand about the revolution, what prompted it and what had come of it.”

She persuaded the university to allow her to go to Egypt and attend classes at The American University in Cairo for a semester-long study abroad in 2013.

Along with spending time in the classroom, Crane was intent on trying to find an English-language publication that could be persuaded to allow her to work there as an intern.

She managed to land an internship at the *Daily News Egypt*, working as a political reporter. That’s where her time in Morocco came in handy. Although the Arabic spoken in Morocco is much different than that spoken in Egypt, she was able to use



her English, Arabic, and French language skills in her reporting.

During her stint at the newspaper she covered such things as demonstrations, press conferences, and the activities of nongovernmental organizations. “For sure it was the highlight of my study abroad.”

During that semester in Cairo, “one thing I learned about the political situation here is how nuanced it is,” Crane says. In her reporting for the *Daily News*

Egypt, she spoke to people from across the spectrum—from rich to poor and rural to urban Egyptians.

“Everybody had different experiences with what was going on. One person’s good guy was another person’s bad guy,” she says. “One person’s life was going well and another person’s was in shambles.”

She learned that by telling the stories of what individual Egyptians had experienced and were experiencing, she could help break through misperceptions and preconceptions.

When she returned to Miami University, her goal became to head back to Egypt and write a book about the Egyptians and their personal experiences.

Last year she was awarded Miami University’s Joanna Jackson Goldman Memorial Prize. The \$30,000 prize is awarded each year to a Miami University senior and is



Crane Linn

intended to give the winner an opportunity to pursue activities that are designed to enhance his or her future work and career. Crane’s dream was to return to Egypt and write the book, *Voices of the Revolution: The Untold Narratives of Egypt’s Awakening*.

She also was one of 21 seniors who were selected to receive the university’s President’s Distinguished Service Award, which is presented to those who make an

outstanding contribution to the campus, to the community and to higher education. Crane was recognized for her “rare combination of academic rigor and use of social science to speak to pressing real-world problems.”

Thanks to the Goldman Prize, Crane returned to Cairo in August 2014 to undertake research for her book. The manuscript is now completed, and she’s working to find a publisher. She plans to spend the rest of the year in Egypt, working as a freelance writer.

Her book tells the story of Egypt since the start of the revolution through the perspectives and experiences of four very different individuals: a housewife; a man with a business located near Tahrir Square, which was ground zero for the 2010 uprising; a lesbian who before the revolution was quite open about her sexual orientation; and a young man from rural Egypt who was drafted into the army.

The book weaves together the stories of how each person experienced “the same big events that shook the whole nation. The experience is so different, depending on who you are, where you are,” Crane says. “There’s nothing about it (the revolution) that’s black and white.”

In a country with a population of 90 million, each person went through a unique experience, and she aims to portray the feelings and humanity of each of her characters.

Her target audience for the book is Western readers, and she hopes that by reading the book, Westerners will find personal connections with the people of Egypt. “When you connect or identify with someone, even if they are very different than you, then you care about them,” she says.

“Personal stories are powerful instruments for change.”

Emily Crane Linn in Egypt, where she worked on a book about the Egyptian revolution from the perspectives of four different Egyptians



COURTESY OF EMILY CRANE LINN

DISHANI JAYAWEERA

SRI LANKA

For Dishani Jayaweera, becoming a leader for peace in her native Sri Lanka was driven by a desire to give back.

“The world has given me so much and I want to give what I can back as my way of showing gratitude,” says Jayaweera, who cofounded and runs the Centre for Peace-Building and Reconciliation (CPBR) outside of Colombo.

She was working in logistics for the National Integration Program Unit, comprised of a group of academics who were studying peace from different perspectives, when she was offered a full scholarship to come to the United States for three weeks in 2001 and participate in the Conflict Transformation Across Cultures (CONTACT) Summer Peacebuilding Program at the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont. Founded in 1997, the CONTACT program is a graduate certificate program of the SIT Summer Peacebuilding Institute held annually for peacemakers from around the world. CONTACT takes place in June on SIT’s Vermont campus and in South Asia in December.

There she studied with peacebuilders from around the world. One of the key concepts she learned and embraced was reconciliation. “The reconciliation word was very new to me,” says Jayaweera, who studied law at university and briefly practiced as an attorney. She spent the third week of the program concentrating on the topic of reconciliation with a group of other students.

During her time in Vermont she was encouraged by CONTACT Founder and former Director Paula Green (who retired in June 2015) to take a peace leadership role in her homeland, and Jayaweera returned home and taught a two-hour session to youth about reconciliation.

“I felt a huge social responsibility because so many people gave to help me,” Jayaweera says.

She began working in peace and reconciliation efforts at the grassroots level, in a country scarred by the civil war between Sri Lanka’s majority Sinhalese population and minority Tamils. To try to help heal the wounds, CPBR has focused its peace and reconciliation efforts on youth and religious leaders.

Jayaweera, who is a Buddhist, says most peacebuilding efforts in Sri Lanka had been led by Muslims and Christians. Buddhists “hadn’t taken a leadership role. This was a vacuum we can fill. If you work with the Buddhist monks

Dishani Jayaweera, a native Sri Lankan, teaches youth in Sri Lanka about peace and reconciliation.



in a village you can address all the Buddhists in the village,” she says.

CPBR also has opted to focus on youth, which have led uprisings in the country. “Universities were hotbeds for the rebel groups,” she says. Her organization pushes for justice, equality, and power-sharing through the use of nonviolence.

In 2012 Jayaweera received the Peacemakers in Action Award from the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding in New York.

One of CPBR’s recent focuses has been on collecting recommendations from the community and religious leaders on how to bring about reconciliation in the country. The recommendations call for opportunities for healing of those affected by war; implementing a trilingual policy, in which Sinhala, Tamil, and English will all be used; restructuring the formal education system; establishing an interfaith



Jayaweera

council to promote interfaith culture; introducing a media policy that respects diversity; and introducing a constitutional amendment that ensures equality and equity.

Now CPBR is beginning advocacy work to try to make those goals a reality. “Bringing at least two to three recommendations to the policy level is one of our dreams,” she says. **IE**

SUSAN LADIKA is a freelance writer in Tampa, Florida. Her last article for *IE* was “Going Home to Teach” about

former international students returning to their homelands to improve education, which appeared in the September/October 2015 issue.

(ENDNOTES)

¹ Estimates of the death are according to the *BBC News*. See “Rwanda Genocide: 100 Days of Slaughter,” *BBC News*, April 7, 2014, online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26875506>. The United Nations estimated the death toll to be up to one million. See <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/education/rwandagenocide.shtml>.

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