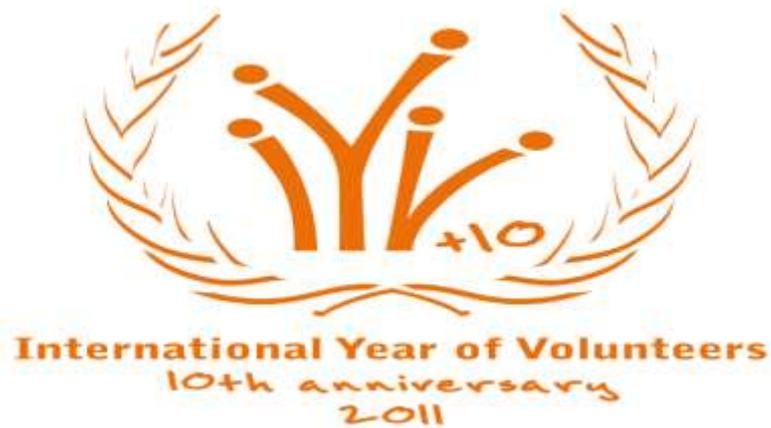


# THE PEACE GONG

## Communication for Peace and Conflict Resolution

A Module

For College Students, Schools & Shishu Panchayats



*Developed by*

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation, New  
Delhi

*We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far. – Swami Vivekananda*

*Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all- children, young men and women or grown-up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the Law of life, it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts. – Mahatma Gandhi*

## Thou Art the Sky (Gitanjali, Verse 67)

*Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well.  
O thou beautiful, there in the nest is thy love that  
encloses the soul with colours and sounds and  
odours.*

*There comes the morning with the golden basket in  
her right hand  
bearing the wreath of beauty, silently to crown the  
earth.*

*And there comes the evening over the lonely  
meadows deserted by herds,  
through trackless paths, carrying draughts of peace  
in her golden pitcher from the western ocean of rest.  
But there, where spreads the infinite sky for the soul  
to take her  
flight in, reigns the stainless white radiance. There is  
no day nor night, nor form nor colour, and never,  
never a word.*

## The Contour

More than ever before it is important to motivate the youth and children to volunteer for constructive community work and work for an inclusive social transformation. Also it is important to help imbibe amongst them positive behaviour and attitudes so that they become responsible citizens and develop empathy for fellow human beings. All of us can achieve a lot and motivate others for the overall betterment of the society if we can communicate properly and avoid conflicts. A non-violent behaviour and attitude is the panacea for many conflicts and misunderstanding in our society.

It is in this context that the **Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation** is embarking upon this **Communication for Peace and Conflict Resolution initiative** for college students, school students and members of shishu panchayats in different parts of the country. A peaceful and conflict-less society is an important parameter for young people to contribute to innovative community development. This initiative is linked to the endeavour of the Foundation to encourage, recognize and promote youth initiative for '*Innovative Interventions for Community Development*'. It is part of our The Peace Gong Media and Information Literacy Programme.

The Foundation strongly believes that volunteers need to be trained to communicate for peace and resolve conflicts so that they can play a more meaningful role and be effective in any volunteer initiatives of theirs.

As part of this initiative, youth and children will be encouraged to imbibe and promote peace amongst themselves and in the community. Through this process, we can develop a cadre of young volunteers who would work for peace and non-violence. This initiative is significant in the backdrop of the global community celebrating the first decade after the International Year of Volunteers in 2001(IYV+10). Besides, 2010-2011 also happens to be the International Year of the Youth. Different tools of communications will be used by youth and children to further a culture of peace. These include inter-personal communication skills, group communications, folk and traditional media, modern and new media.

This module is dedicated to the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. According to Tagore, civilization fails when it maintains entrenched inequalities and ignores the need for inclusive social transformations. He said, "No great civilization is possible in a country divided by the constant interruption of steep mountains, as they retard the natural flow of communication. Large fortunes and luxurious living, like the mountains, from high walls of segregation. They produce worse divisions in society than physical barriers.

The thrust of the Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation is community building through innovative social and civic transformation. In this context, it is worthwhile to quote Tagore, who said, “The community becomes a common ground where relations are extended from the self to others, from the present to the future.”

Whenever we think of any peace initiative or peace studies, the main paradigm is Gandhi. In this module we take leaf from the Gandhian perspective of peace and non-violence. For Gandhi, non-violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force.

Gandhi was clear in his views on non-violence. He said, “The very first step in non-violence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving, kindness...Non-violence is an unchangeable creed. It has to be pursued in face of violence raging around you.”

During the freedom struggle, both Gandhi and Tagore understood that violence was a path unworthy of humanity.

Besides volunteers and students will be encouraged to use non-violent communication to resolve conflict situations and address critical issues. Non-violent communication is primarily an attitude in which one tries to work on the specific violence in each human being. From this awareness, one tries to develop a more intelligent way of reacting in conflicts. Non-violent communication is based on empathy- the ability to listen profoundly, to reflect on others observation, needs and demands.

Mediation, negotiation, techniques of non-violent communication are tools of non-violent transformation and resolution of conflicts. Orientation in these will be part of the Communication for Peace and Conflict Resolution programme.

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## Section 1

### Facilitating an environment of peace and conflict-less community

According to Rabindranath Tagore, moral and spiritual values constituted the most important aspect of education. He said it was important to develop abilities to put to use what one has learnt and to develop curiosity and alertness. The child should be able to appreciate a sense of freedom acquired by free movements of the body in the midst of natural environment.

- A) In the first step, the participating students should be encouraged to develop a peace song/anthem. It should be a participatory process where all group members should come together to develop the peace song. It should be an original attempt and not based on existing songs. This exercise will promote creativity.
- B) Research on traditional folk media of the area. Develop a 'Peace Programme' using the tradition folk media. Try to highlight this by staging it at several places. This exercise will also create awareness on the local folk tradition and help develop a culture of peace.
- C) The participants should be encouraged to develop a peace skit/play to create awareness on non-violent behaviour.
- D) Develop an Art Exhibition on *Vision of a Peace Community & Peace and Environment*. Remember peace can be furthered only when we work towards a peaceful environment.
- E) A series of innovative posters can be developed to promote non-violent behaviour and communications. Posters and wall papers are integral part of the programme and should be linked to the 'Thinking Sessions'. These sessions will involve discussions and collective learning experiences on different issues related to Peace and Conflict Resolution.
- F) Negotiate with the community to get a public space to put up peace messages/posters. Peace Corners can be developed in significant locations to help further a culture of peace and non-violence. For instance, the Surovi Shishu Panchayat in Assam has adopted a local park for its upkeep. In the same way, local shishu panchayats/schools/colleges can negotiate to get a Peace Corner in the public space to put up peace messages.
- G) *Critical Communication and Media Education for Peace*. The overarching goal of the initiative is to develop critical understanding of communication and media for peace. The aim will be to enhance

communicative skills and this will be linked to the 'Thinking Sessions'. The participants will also learn how to construct and deconstruct messages to further peace; try to develop effective messages for persuasion, advancement of non-violent behaviour and tolerance.

#### **H) The Peace Gong, the global children's newspaper :**

A significant initiative of the Foundation is the children's newspaper, The Peace Gong. The aim of the newspaper is to build bridges of friendship amongst children of the world to volunteer to work for peace and non-violence. As part of this training module, children can develop The Peace Gong wall paper in their local languages highlighting peace messages. Snapshots of these wall papers can be put together in the main edition of The Peace Gong.

### **Section 2**

#### **Thinking Session 1:**

- a) Organize discussions on non-violent attitudes and behaviour amongst the participants. List them. Discuss what the group feel about violent attitudes and behaviour. Let there be a reflection on the importance of living in peace.
- b) Reflect as a group on the impact of violent behaviour and attitudes in the society.
- c) Reflect on what you can do to be non-violent even if someone is bad with you.
- d) Reflect how you can adopt peaceful attitudes in your daily life.
- e) As a group effort, develop posters on non-violent behaviour attitudes and behaviour. Publicize these in the community and initiate dialogue amongst your peers.
- f) Collect stories/poems on non-violent attitudes and behaviour. Use them during the dialogue in the community.

#### **Thinking Session 2**

*The very first step in non-violence is that we cultivate it in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving kindness.- Mahatma Gandhi.*

- a) Participants discuss the above in a session and reflect if they are able to cultivate these in their daily lives. Ensure that it is a participatory process. Use chart papers/flip charts.
- b) Reflect how we can cultivate basic non-violence in our daily lives; how we can persuade others to practise it.

- c) Develop posters/communication materials on the basis of the above discussions.
- d) Organize a performance using the traditional folk media of the area.
- e) Through these the participants/shishu panchayats/school /colleges can take the essence of basic non-violence in the community.

### Thinking Session 3

- a) From developing understanding of basic non-violence, it is time to work towards controlling one's anger. Anger management is an essential ingredient of any non-violent behaviour. Each one of us gets angry at different points of time. If we can control anger and convert it into positive energy, we can achieve a lot. There will be peace within us and we can promote peace in the society.
- b) The best way in anger management is to maintain an anger journal. Mahatma Gandhi used to do the same. Maintain a dairy every day.
- c) Write down the points on why you got angry on a particular day.
- d) In the dairy, analyze the causes of why you got angry.
- e) Analyze what you gained and what you lost from being angry.
- f) Think closely on who made you angry.
- g) Could you have reacted differently and could the other person reacted differently.
- h) Analyze if your response was correct after getting angry.
- i) List the lessons learnt.
- j) Once we start maintaining an anger journal, over a period of time we would be able to control anger. Anger management is important for furthering a peaceful society.

### Thinking Session 4

If one does not practice non-violence in one's personal relations with others, and hopes to use it in bigger affairs, one is vastly mistaken. Non-violence like charity must begin at home. – Mahatma Gandhi.

- a) Once again, it is time for discussions. This issue is linked to the previous session- on anger management. Students should practice non-violence in one's personal relations.
- b) For practicing non-violence in one's relations, it is important to not only develop respect for each other but also appreciate each other's views.
- c) The trait of listening to others must be cultivated. The art of listening and appreciating other's view is crucial in non-violent communication.
- d) Participants should list ways in which they can cultivate non-violent practices amongst themselves.

- e) Students can make use of different tools of communications- posters/story-telling/folk media/films/plays etc to create awareness.

### **Thinking Session 5**

Analysing one's speech and action – aiming towards non-violent communication.

- a) Gandhi believed that there was no better way to lose a cause than to abuse an opponent. He made harsh indictment of violent communication practices. He was concerned with the violent speech and actions and their effects. He said, “We must rid ourselves of petty jealousies and bickering.”
- b) For our self-development and our stand for the right cause, it is important that we practise non-violent communications. Also we should think big and not confine ourselves to pettiness.
- c) This session helps students to reflect upon their own speech and action. Critical analysis of words we use in our daily lives while talking is taken up. Can we improve ourselves in our dealings with others?
- d) Students recollect and list a few action and speech of theirs which they deem as violent. Then there is discussion on these in the group.
- e) Next, students jointly jot down in what way they could have responded to the situation so that others would not have been offended.
- f) Students brainstorm on how to respond to difficult situations non-violently.
- g) A poster exhibition on non-violent gesture and speech is organized in the community.

### **Thinking Session 5(a)**

This session is an extension to the previous session. It is important to work closely to develop the art of non-violent communication.

- a) In a group situation, analyze some speeches or sentences that you make while speaking.
- b) Get other students to reflect on what they feel around these words or actions. This will help students to express their feelings and develop their emotional vocabulary. This will help in establishing communication with others.
- c) Students should list and reflect on how they can develop empathy in their relationship with others. Only when we have discarded all prejudice and judgement towards other people, we can develop empathy.
- d) For developing empathy, it is important to analyze and identify the needs that our feelings may stem from. Discuss a real-life situation and reflect on how we can develop empathy- by identifying the needs that our feelings stem from.

## Thinking Session 6

One of the ways in which we can avoid conflicts is by keeping eyes on details. An aim of this initiative is to help the participants develop the ability to keep an eye on the minutest details. This will enable a student to avoid half-baked responses to different situations. Students should learn the art of trying to discern facts and not speculate in the void.

“Do not cite epigrams churned out by others, think for yourself. Thought is more precious than language and judgement most precious of all. If the judgement is faulty everything else is worth nothing.”- Mahatma Gandhi

- a) This session is a group exercise.
- b) Let each student think of a difficult situation s/he found herself/himself.
- c) Let the student reflect how s/he responded to it.
- d) Let there be discussion on whether the student had tried to keep an eye on the minutest details while responding. Or whether s/he tried to discern facts.
- e) List out the gains one can make if one is meticulous with the last details.
- f) How can students keep this in mind while dealing with situations in their daily lives? Brainstorm.
- g) Develop a strategy by which you can motivate others to imbibe a habit of discerning facts and keep an eye on the last details.

## Thinking Session 7

- a) We come across conflict situations in our everyday lives. With the skills developed in the above sessions, students/volunteers could now look at how they resolve conflict in a non-violent manner.
- b) Students should develop ability to speak positively with facts.
- c) Students should be able to articulate and make their opinions heard.
- d) Learn how to establish dialogue to resolve conflict.
- e) Learn the art of negotiation and co-operation; rather than retreat into competitive confrontation.
- f) The aim is to develop critical thinking abilities and be alert. This will enable them to be innovative and use their creativity in finding solutions to resolve conflicts.
- g) Use Case Study method. One conflict situation in the community is taken as a case study.
- h) Analyze the root causes of the conflict.
- i) List out how students based on their experiences and learning resolve the conflict through dialogue and negotiation.
- j) Facilitate understanding of non-violent conflict resolution method through role plays and stimulation exercises.
- k) Participants could make use of various tools of communication to create awareness on non-violent conflict resolution methods.

## **Thinking Session 8**

### **Developing listening skills**

It is important for us to develop listening skills. This will enable us to know each other better, help resolve conflict situations and help facilitate dialogues on contentious issues. To be a better and effective communicator we must learn the art of listening and developing empathy towards others views.

- a) Write down experiences on how you benefitted by patiently listening to others views.
- b) Organize a visit to a community and try to find out their problem. Listen to the people carefully. After coming back try to analyse how you gained by listening instead of pushing your own views.
- c) Discuss how you can improve your listening skills.
- d) Discuss you can resolve conflicts by being a better listener.

## **Thinking Session 9**

It is important to look at the root causes of conflicts, analyze them to evolve solutions to resolve them. This session will help students analyze conflict situations. They should be able to identify the relevant parties to the conflict, their interests, needs and fears.

- a) Use the Case Study method. Take up an example of conflict situation in the community.
- b) Discuss the salient points of the conflict situation.
- c) Then divide the group into sub-groups.
- d) Let each sub-group critically analyze the conflict situations-identify the actors involved in the conflict; look at the causes which resulted in the conflict; discuss the varied interests involved; discuss the needs of the parties involved; list out the possible fear factors involved amongst the parties.
- e) Let the sub-groups discuss innovative and inclusive solutions which would aim to take care of the needs and interests of the parties to the conflict.
- f) There may be conflict situations in your community. Try to put to practise your learnings to analyze these conflicts and help resolve these using non-violent methods.

## **Thinking Session 10**

Each one of us is using multiple media more than ever before. Children and youth are greatly exposed different media 24x7. It is important for them to develop critical media literacy skills so that they can discern on what is good and what is bad. As part of this session, a popular film, any serial, an advertisement or a news story can be taken. Students can deconstruct it. Through deconstruction, students will be able to look at the harmful contents of the media. The following are steps in media deconstruction (any film, serial, news etc can be deconstructed using these questions):

- a) What is the context? What is the background and environment from which the media examples you are trying to deconstruct come from?
- b) Who is being targeted? Who do you think are the main consumers of this particular media product?
- c) What does the story say? What do you understand by the film/serial etc you are trying to deconstruct. What is the text of the message? Is there a subtext?
- d) What messages and values are being expressed? Why do you think the story is being presented in the way it is being shown or written about? What could be the underlying reasons?
- e) How is the story constructed? What kind of techniques is being used? List the technology used and the methods of persuasion?
- f) What do you think is not being told in the story? Do you think there are missing information or counter messages?
- g) Do you think the story is accurate, fair, truthful and complete?
- h) In what ways is the media sample you are deconstruction portrays a healthy and or unhealthy media message?

*While students are deconstructing they should keep the following in mind:*

- 1) All media messages are 'constructed'.
- 2) Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
- 3) Different people experience the same media message differently.
- 4) Media have embedded values and points of view.