

KarmaCafé

SPIRITUAL EVENT

Feminine forces

The conference 'Making Way for the Feminine', organised by Global Peace Initiative of Women, was recently held in Jaipur. **Swati Chopra** reports

Most of us go through life tied to the grindstone of ambition, relationships, emotions and desires. We may cycle from one to the other several times a day, and at times find ourselves burdened by the toll restlessness, disappointment and heartache take on us. And then, unexpectedly, a book might find its way into our hands or we meet somebody or find ourselves in a situation that draws us out of our usual mental chatter and puts us into a new state of being. A shift occurs and we may become calmer, less selfish and more compassionate because we realise something new - something that inspires us through contact with a different way of being, and changes us.

The international conference 'Making Way for the Feminine', recently organised by the Global Peace Initiative of Women in Jaipur, was such an experience for me - rich in inspiration as a woman, spiritual seeker, writer and aspiring activist. It was a gathering of women from all corners of the earth, including conflict areas in



Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Israel and Tibet. The emphasis was not simply on hearing the feminine perspective, it was on learning from feminine wisdom. It was about enabling those who were stuck in difficult situations, and to become inspired by spiritual wisdom; especially feminine values of cooperation rather than competition, nurture rather than consumption, integration rather than division.

We didn't just talk about these values, we experienced them directly in the presence of women spiritual leaders such as Ammachi, the 'hugging guru'; Dadi Janki, the 92-year-old head of the Brahmakumaris; Sheikha Cemalnur Sargut, a Turkish

Sufi teacher; Rabbi Namaah Kelman, the first woman rabbi in Israel, and many others. In Ammachi's embrace I felt immersed in the healing power of unconditional love; in Dadi's quietly joyous presence, my heart learned how to smile, no matter what.

There was opportunity for healing and applying spiritual values to divisive issues when women who had undergone tremendous suffering shared their stories. Theary Seng, a human rights activist from Cambodia who had lived through the horror of the Khmer Rouge killing fields, found a way to let go of the past with the example of Ven. Maha Ghosananda, a Buddhist monk who showed the

way to external peace by first allowing it to blossom in one's heart. Indeed, seeds of peace exist within all of us. It is up to each individual to keep them well nourished and give them space to grow. Through this dialogue a new blueprint for peacemaking emerged - where we would become 'soldiers of peace' who use 'bullets of loving-kindness' in our activism.

In Marguerite Barankitse, Burundi's Mother Teresa, the Devi emerged in her *avatar* as 'maximum mother'. Marguerite braved civil war and torture to actualise her dream of raising a generation of children from opposing tribes who would realise their common humanity. Today, she is the 'mother of 10,000 children' who live together in her house of love - Shalom House. She inspired us to realise our innate motherhood that has nothing to do with biology, which is rooted in our potential to nurture and unite. With Kholisa Mxenge and Dr Nokuzola Mndende, traditional healers and wise women from South Africa, we celebrated our womanhood, as we tapped our feet in rhythm to their full-throated songs, and released our love and longings into the pollen-laden air.

I return from this gathering full of inspiration, a mindful of ideas and a pocketful of friendships. And the realisation that it requires complete openness to allow a shift out of preconceptions and to let the world in. Once we are as open as we can be, we make ourselves available to the alchemy of inspiration. Winds of wisdom can then blow in and unshackle us, setting us on the path to positive change. ■ Visit www.gpiw.org for more. *Swati Chopra is the author of Dharamsala Diaries (Penguin) and Buddhism: On the Path to Nirvana (Brijbasi)*