



LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR PEACE PROJECT

Case Study

The Harmony Project of the St. Xavier's Social Service Society Ahmedabad, Gujarat India

This case study is one of a series of case studies developed as part of the Local Capacities for Peace Project, directed by the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA), in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA.

The Project seeks to identify the ways in which international humanitarian and/or development assistance given in conflict settings may be provided so that, rather than exacerbating and worsening the conflict, it helps local people to disengage and to establish alternative systems for dealing with the problems which underlie the conflict.

For more information on the Local Capacities for Peace Project, see www.cdainc.com

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I. INTRODUCTION/CONTEXT

The state of Gujarat is north of Bombay on the north-west coast of India. Gujarat has a population of 41 million people. The religious affiliation of the people is 89 percent Hindu, 9 percent Muslim, 1.4 percent Jain, .4 percent Christian, and .1 percent Sikh. On the banks of the Sabarmati River lies Ahmedabad, the largest city in Gujarat and the commercial capital. Roughly 70 percent of Ahmedabad's population is Hindu; 20 percent, Muslim.

Politically, Gujarat has been generally a stronghold of the Indian National Congress party and one of its derivatives, the Congress (I) party.² It should be noted, however, that in November 1989, the party suffered a major setback with the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gaining significant political victories. This included getting control of the municipal government of Ahmedabad.

The political rhetoric of the BJP has a tendency to exacerbate sectarian tensions which sometimes result in riots.³ The Congress (I) Party, on the other hand, tends to be viewed as advocating a secular state and has been supported substantially by Muslims and low-income Hindus.

During British rule, Ahmedabad was known as the "Manchester of India" due to its significant textile production. Textile manufacturing continues to be a major part of the city's economy, but Ahmedabad has also developed an impressive research and development sector. It is home to the Physical Research Laboratory, the Indian Space Research Organization, the National Institute of Occupational Health, the Indian Institute of Management and the National Institute of Design.

Ahmedabad's population grew by 50 percent between 1971-81 and 21 percent between 1981-91. According to the government's 1991 census, the population that year was 2.9 million.⁴

Some 41 percent of Ahmedabad's population lives in what the municipal government estimates to be 2,432 slums. Many of the inhabitants migrated to Ahmedabad from rural parts of Gujarat when population growth or poor harvests, or both, resulted in food insecurity. Many are squatters, living on

¹I wish to acknowledge the support of the Kellogg National Fellowship Program of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for the writing of this case study. I also want to thank Fr. Cedric Prakash, the staff of the St. Xavier's Social Services Society and Kathleen Burgoyne for their assistance.

²The first free elections in India were held in 1952. From 1952 to 1967, the Indian National Congress party dominated. In 1967, in making a transition from single party domination into a more multi-party system, the Congress party split. The Congress (I) party emerged as the largest of the "descendent" parties (so named because of Indira Gandhi's prominent role). For helpful background on this political history, especially as it relates to social integration, see Rakha Saxena, Indian Politics in Transition: From Dominance to Chaos (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1994), esp. pp. 1-66.

³The BJP, of course, is by no means reflective of the political sentiments of all Hindus. For a succinct explanation of the rising influence of the BJP, see "The Hindu Upsurge: The Road to Ayodhya," The Economist, February 6, 1993, pp. 21-23.

⁴Figures in this section are largely taken from "Urban Environmental Maps for Bombay, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Vadodara," National Institute of Urban Affairs, New Delhi, February 1994.

land which legally is not theirs, or renters, paying fees to "slumlords." Most of them build shacks with whatever scraps of lumber, metal and plastic they can find. Many of them use "hijacked" electricity by latching a wire to a power-line. Most of the area lacks proper sewage and storm water drainage facilities, though some have access to a shared water source. Generally speaking, their health is poorer and infant mortality higher than in the more "well off" areas of the city. But it is equally true that many of the slum dwellers are better off than if they had stayed in the countryside.

It is from Ahmedabad that Mahatma Gandhi began his historic march protesting the British Salt Law in 1930. Yet this city which boasts the ashram of this leader of non-violence has been plagued with considerable rioting, especially between Muslims and Hindus.

The factors leading to interfaith tension in India can be categorized roughly as historical, economic and psychological. The historical antecedents include Muslim invasions which included the destruction of Hindu temples, militant proselytizing of Hindus by Muslims, and a British colonial policy of "divide and rule" which pitted followers of the two faiths against each other. The economic forces include a fairly consistent difference in the standard of living of the two faiths, with Muslims generally being worse off than Hindus. There is also intense competition between followers of the two faiths for jobs, both with the government and in the private sector. The psychological factors are a function of markedly differing world views derived from very different theologies, one being monotheistic; the other, polytheistic. In addition, the ongoing rivalry with Pakistan (an area which, during British rule, was part of India but was broken off for the purpose of creating a separate homeland for Muslims) provides for transference of domestic sectarian tensions into an international forum, creating mutually reinforcing feedback for Muslim-Hindu rivalry.⁵

The interfaith rioting in Ahmedabad has been concentrated in the slums, where illiteracy is high and propaganda tends to have a potent effect. Riots have, at times, been severe. In 1969, for instance, it is estimated that nearly 1,000 people died in riots in Ahmedabad.⁶ Major riots occurred there during November-December 1990, and December 1992 (including two of the slums of particular interest in this case study--Sankalitnagar and Mahajan-no-Vando--which are identified on the map, below), following the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya by Hindu militants. Violence in Ahmedabad during rioting has included stone throwing, murder, hurling burning rags at crowds, destruction of property, police beatings and robbery. Tear gas has been used regularly by police to disperse crowds during riots.

During the riots, it is mostly men who perpetrate the violence, especially murder. Nevertheless, in an emotional frenzy, women have been seen attacking others, especially other women and children. In addition, women tend to loot, and they, along with children, often serve as propagandists for those engineering riots.

It is believed generally that rioting in Ahmedabad is cultivated by political leaders, real estate

⁵These explanations are drawn largely from Pravin J. Patel, "Communal Riots in Contemporary India: Towards a Sociological Explanation," in Upendra Baxi and Bhikha Parekh (eds.), *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1995), p. 370-399.

⁶Patel, "Communal Riots in Contemporary India," p. 375.

developers and organized, militant groups with foreign support. It is widely accepted that leaders of the BJP have "engineered" riots between Muslims and Hindus as a means of solidifying their political base and of making the Congress (I) Party appear weak. Allegedly, BJP operatives have hired "gangsters," some of whom are slum dwellers themselves, to foment religious violence during volatile periods. These periods tend to coincide with, and are most predictable during, religious holidays, when sectarian collective self-identity becomes more intensely defined and passions tend to run high, including those which can be readily manipulated with us-versus-them and we-are-on-the-good-side, self-righteous justifications.⁷

⁷For a listing of the various Hindu and Muslim festivals in India, see Vajaya Ghose (ed.), TIRTHA: A Treasury of Indian Expressions (New Delhi: CMC Ltd., 1992), esp. pp. 49-52, 54-55.

(Map of Ahmedabad here.)

"Urban Environmental Maps for Bombay, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Vadodara," National Institute of Urban Affairs, New Delhi, February 1994.

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In some instances, real estate developers benefit from the conflict inasmuch as entire communities--which are living in commercially "developable" locations--are dislocated. They allegedly foment violence on their own or through an "alliance of convenience" with BJP leaders. In either case, there is evidence which suggests that this is a well founded allegation.⁸ In a number of instances, after slum dwellers were dislocated because of a riot, the slums have been "leveled" and turned into "middle-class" neighborhoods.

Information on the role of organized, militant groups is hard to find. According to K. N. Shelat, the District Collector based in Ahmedabad, the police are aware of their existence, but counteracting them is difficult.⁹

II. RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT WORK OF ST. XAVIER'S SOCIAL SERVICE SOCIETY

Saint Xavier's Social Service Society (the "Society" for short) has an extensive history of relief and development work in Ahmedabad, dating back to the early 1970's, when it was formed in response to the flooding of the Sabarmati River. Initially directed by Fr. Ramiro Erviti, it was created as the Social Service League program of the students of St. Xavier's School, Loyola Hall, which is run by the Jesuits, the Catholic order of priests of the Society of Jesus. Fr. Erviti died in 1986. An interim director was replaced in 1987, by Fr. Cedric Prakash, a native of India who was born in Bombay. Fr. Prakash also serves as the Coordinator of Social Works for the Ahmedabad Diocese. He does not have a parish, but provides pastoral care to and says Mass regularly for the Missionaries of Charity sisters of the city.

Fr. Prakash sees his Christianity through the lens of a Jesuit, which mandates him to a "service of faith and promotion of justice." He views fighting injustice as a prophetic activity. He feels a special obligation toward poor people. But his heart aches for all those involved in violence--perpetrators as well as victims; rich as well as poor.

Fr. Prakash defines his mission in relation to other religions as showing respect to those of other faiths while acknowledging that "religion and religious beliefs are the most blinding of all passions, especially where the poor are concerned." He nonetheless feels that no religion, in its theological essence, advocates violence and the absence of peace.

The Governing Body of the Society includes Jesuit priests with administrative responsibilities, diocesan staff, researchers and educators, not all of whom are Catholic or Christian. It became registered with the government of India in 1976 as a Trust and Society. It is also registered under the

⁸One such instance was in the Maghaninager area of Ahmedabad.

The District Collector is the head administrator of a district in the Indian political system. The holder of this position also has the power of executive magistrate which can be invoked during times of civil disturbances. In that capacity, this office holder has policing authority greater than a municipal police commissioner.

Foreign Contribution Regulation Act.

The Society receives funding from Aide A L'enfance De L'inde, Luxembourg; Caritas Neerlandica, Netherlands; Caritas Sverige, Sweden; Catholic Relief Services (CRS), United States; Cebemo, Netherlands; the Government of Basel, Switzerland; Manos Unidas, Spain; and, Misereor, Germany; as well as a number of private individuals. Among these international NGOs, CRS is unique in that it has field offices in India (in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and New Delhi) and provides U.S. Government food commodities as well as cash grants. In fact, the Society, serving in a counterpart role with CRS, provides food aid to a network of 48 operating partners in rural areas throughout the state of Gujarat, involving an extensive food-for-work operation. This food program is important in that the scope of the Society's support for relief and development activities reaches beyond Ahmedabad, as does the administrative authority of prominent government officials with whom the Society maintains cordial working relations.

The Society's work is largely foreign funded. Occasionally, it receives small grants from the Government and some private donations from local supporters. In addition, minor fees are charged for medicines in the slums which help finance dispensaries.

The annual budget of the Society, excluding the value of food commodities, has averaged roughly \$100,000-125,000 during the 1990s. Of that, close to 75 percent is devoted to the Society's community organizing, training and other programs in the slums and villages. The rest covers salaries, building rent and the cost of a documentation center on social, environmental, health and human rights issues.

The value of food commodities distributed by the Society is about \$1,000,000 annually. Most of this goes to 48 "operating partners" throughout Gujarat, though the Society uses some commodities during emergencies in Ahmedabad.

The Society has a professional staff of close to 20 full-time people, with numerous others (especially health workers) working on a part-time contractual basis. The staff members of the Society include Hindus, Muslims, Jains and Christians.

The Society works in the poorest communities in Ahmedabad, focusing on three major, flood-prone slum areas: Sankalitnagar, Mahajan-no-Vando and Nagori Kabarasthan (see the map of Ahmedabad). The Sankalitnagar slum, where the Society began working in 1973, has a population of close to 25,000. Prior to the 1990s, the slum was roughly 60 percent Muslim and 40 percent Hindu. Thereafter, it gradually has become almost completely Muslim, with only close to one percent being Hindu. The Mahajan-no-Vando slum, where the Society began working in 1983, has a population of close to 12,000 within a geographical area of 12,807 square meters. It is almost completely Hindu, with only a few Muslim families living on the periphery. The people technically are living on land held in a private trust. Many of the Hindus are dependant on the Muslims of the community for petty domestic jobs and on their shops for purchasing goods. The Nagori Kabarasthan slum, where the Society also began working in 1983, is about 18,000 in population, with a geographical area of 10,556 square meters. It is 95 percent Hindu, with a few Muslim families living in the middle and a few more

on the periphery.¹⁰

Beginning in 1992, the Society began a deliberate outreach program to establish a presence in 20 other slums in Ahmedabad. Most of these outreach areas were sites of the Society's previous emergency activities, when relief tended to be a beginning of an agency-community relationship. An outreach effort generally begins with primary health and non-formal education services.

The inhabitants of these slums face pressures from a multitude of sources. Most work as manual laborers, domestic helpers, petty retailers and semi-skilled trade workers. The average monthly family income is \$40-50, which becomes increasingly inadequate due to inflation. The families in these communities face crowding pressures due to population growth and in-migration (the average family dwelling is 10 feet by 12 feet). Their homes are built of discarded materials. Four months of the year, when the temperature can reach as high as 115 degrees fahrenheit, the heat inside the tin-roofed homes compels people to sleep in the filthy, sewage-laden alleyways between the dwellings. During the three-month monsoon, it is not uncommon to find ankle-deep water inside these dwellings. During high winds, the structures sometimes collapse.

Survey, Relief and Rehabilitation Following Riots

The Society has assisted the government in assessing the number of injuries and damage to property incurred during riots and has provided medical care, food, edible oil and blankets to victims of the violence.¹¹ In some instances, staff members of the Society have found it necessary to search for people who have fled and to provide them transportation back to the site of their former domicile.

As mentioned previously, the Society's relief activities are not confined to the slums in which it has an established presence. Following a riot, the Society's staff goes to the affected areas, identifies those with genuine riot-related needs, and attempts to provide them with assistance. The Society does not set up temporary offices there; the staff merely conducts a survey and then accesses and distributes resources.

Flood Relief

In 1987, the Society received a grant for its work in the Mahajan-no-Vando and Nagori Kabarasthan slums. This 3-year slum "upgradation" project was valued at \$611,268, of which \$84,613 was contributed by Catholic Relief Services' Bombay office. Most of the rest was provided by the municipal government, with the Society serving as an oversight body. This project included the establishment of health clinics, community organizations (especially the formation of women's groups), financing land tenure litigation, upgrading of infrastructure (including sanitation, street lighting, water supply and road paving) and material assistance for home improvements. Slum Upgradation Project, Project #834-86-016, Evaluation Report, CRS, March-April 1992.

Concrete examples: (1) In November and December 1990, the Society provided medical assistance to people hurt during rioting from a pool of nearly 10,000 who were living in temporary relief camps. CRS/Bombay provided \$5,000 for this relief operation. (2) In January 1993, following the December, 1992 riots, the Society distributed 800 tins of edible oil, 1,300 blankets and 500 kilograms of wheat flour, benefiting some 5,184 people. In addition, the Society, with a grant from Campana of Spain, provided an average of Rs. 2,000 per family (roughly \$67) as a grant to help people purchase lumber and other building materials for the reconstruction of their homes. Roughly 800 homes were rebuilt with these grants. People also were given money from the government for this purpose.

The Society regularly assists slum areas affected severely by floods. In such instances, the staff sets up health clinics, distributes food and supplies materials for temporary housing.¹² In addition, the Society has taken an active role in a city-wide task force in response to the 1993 flood.

Community Health

A main focus of the Society in the slums is community health. The activities include providing growth monitoring services for children, health education, immunizations, midwifery training, tuberculosis patient treatment and monitoring health outreach when epidemics break out.¹³

Education

The Society initially established a non-formal education program, called INNED for INNovative EDucation, in the Sankalitinagar slum. In the early 1990s, it expanded this program to the Mahajan-no-Vando and Nagori Kabarasthan slums. It is a supplemental program which encourages children to participate in formal schooling. Through the INNED program, children are taken on educational field trips, shown educational films and are provided an opportunity to attend educational/leadership camps. The children also perform street plays designed to raise awareness about health and other community issues.¹⁴

One of the approaches of the program is to sensitize parents to the importance of education. Not only is school attendance emphasized, but a proper appearance and sanitary health practices also

A concrete example: During a flood emergency in July 1993, when Ahmedabad faced its worst flood since 1973, the Society, along with the Missionaries of Charity Sisters, set up medical clinics to respond to cholera and intestinal illness due to the unsanitary conditions resulting from the high water. Plastic sheeting, bamboo, medical supplies and food were provided. This assistance was provided mainly in the Shahpur Darwaja and Shantipura areas where 9 feet of water had literally washed people's houses away, and in the Khanjiara Darwaja (which is one of the 20 outreach slums) and Saptarushi Badhar areas close to Haveli. Here, 2,000 people assembled in a nearby municipal school for shelter. These activities were funded by CRS/Bombay and by Aide A L'enfance d L'inde (Luxembourg), both of which provided a separate grant of \$8,333.

Some examples include: In 1992, the Society provided growth monitoring services for 701 children in Sankalitinagar, 161 children in Mahajan-no-Vando, and 199 children in Nagori Kabarasthan; monitored ante-natal patients: 225 in Sankalitinagar, 55 in Mahajan-no-Vando, and 76 in Nagori Kabarasthan; conducted eight "health camps" throughout Ahmedabad (one of which was in Sankalitinagar and another in Mahajan-no-Vando), one aimed at teenage girls and two others on the health of women; and, conducted five month-long training programs for community health workers. In 1993, the Society provided: community health services through their clinics and outreach workers to 8,649 patients in the urban slum settlements of Sankalitinagar (5,441 patients), Mahajan-no-Vando (1,810 patients) and Nagori Kabarasthan (1,398 patients); 254 ante-natal check-ups, 537 growth monitoring visits and 1,104 immunizations in Sankalitinagar, 61 ante-natal check-ups, 102 growth monitoring visits and 179 immunizations in Mahajan-no-Vando, and 53 ante-natal checkups, 150 growth monitoring visits and 228 immunizations in Nagori Kabarasthan; midwife training for ten of its Village Health Workers; a testing and certification program to participating Village Health Workers, who were provided six workshops on naturopathy, homeopathy and accupressure (the Society attempts to promote alternative medical approaches); six health education meetings in various slums--three on tuberculosis; two on general health practices and one on ante- and post-natal health; diagnosis and treatment to 173 tuberculosis patients in the slums; and, community health education in response to a jaundice epidemic in the slums, during which close to 200 people in Ahmedabad died of the illness (none of the areas in which the Society had a health program was affected).

One such play, put on in Nagori Kabarasthan during 1993, focused on the evils of sectarian violence.

are stressed.

From 1991-1993, 150-200 students participated in the Nagori Kabarasthan and Mahajan-no-Vando slums. During a mountaineering/leadership camp held in the summer of 1993, 109 boys participated including 4 from Sankalitnagar and 21 from Mahajan-no-Vando. None attended from Nagori Kabarasthan.

The education program in Sankalitnagar no longer provides supplementary classes. Its sole focus is on encouraging children to attend formal schools.

One measure of the success of this program is that 9 of the children ranked first in academic tests, 9 others ranked second, and 11 ranked third in 1992-1993, outranking many children from "better-off" neighborhoods in various schools in Ahmedabad.

The Society also is attempting to develop education programs in the 20 outreach slums.

Human Rights

The Society has a program which focuses on the human rights of the people it serves, aimed largely at increasing an awareness of their legal protections. It has a special focus on issues facing women and the prevention of spousal abuse. The approach is one of mediation more than litigation. Nevertheless, in April 1992, the Society, through public interest litigation, was instrumental in securing the life sentence of a man for burning his wife to death. This conviction, according to Fr. Prakash, has markedly reduced spousal abuse in that slum.

The Society retains legal counsel for protecting slum dwellers involved in land disputes. It has had more success in preventing eviction than it has in securing legal titles to land.¹⁵

Development Activities Focused on Women

The Society has a savings program which is focused specifically on women. It initially did not have a gender differentiation in the program. The Society found, however, that it was necessary for the women to create separate bank accounts. In so doing, women's savings went up tremendously due to their confidence that the money will be spent in ways agreeable to them.

The Society has cultivated a women's committee in each of the three main slums in which it is working. This committee is the focal point for the savings scheme as well as a maternal-child health program aimed at pre- and post-natal care

The fact that Indian law tends to protect slum dwellers from being evicted may have the effect, however unintentional, of increasing the manipulative cultivation of riots by real estate developers. Apparently, if the slum dwellers' property is completely torn down and abandoned temporarily during a riot, their legal rights relative to preventing eviction are jeopardized. In such cases, a person from each concerned family is often asked to go back to the violence-stricken area to "hold on to the plot" at considerable physical risk.

Environmental Emphases

Largely through its food-for-work program in rural areas through operating partners, the Society seeks to protect the environment. Program participants engage in tree planting, watershed management and wasteland development. In addition, it also promotes the use of alternative energies, especially solar kitchens used in feeding programs.

III. THE CULTIVATION OF INTERFAITH HARMONY

The conflict prevention and mitigation activities of the Society took considerable staff creativity to develop. Designing and establishing a program to help prevent violence was, according to Fr. Prakash, "not a planned process." It began in 1991, when the Society's staff tried to answer questions about the causes of conflict in the slums. In Fr. Prakash's words:

We decided to take a look at the why of the whole thing...what has to be done to change the situation? We looked at the life of the poor; how they are constantly subjected to many dehumanizing processes. We looked at the role of the building lobby; the land sharks and land brokers who would like some of these poor people out. We looked at the politicians who don't want to come to grips with the situation poor people are in. We concluded that the poor are being used.¹⁶

From this conclusion, they decided they needed to develop a deliberate strategy to promote harmony.

The Society did not receive encouragement from any of its foreign funders to pursue a conflict prevention and mitigation program. All of them have, however, provided moral support since the conflict prevention and mitigation work began.

The approaches the Society has employed have included street plays, creative contests for children, a festival, the creation of peace activities by community committees within slums, participation in a quasi-governmental organization, integrating harmony themes into other programs, performing symbolic gestures for peace, providing a safe haven to potential victims of violence, and "myth busting" counter inflammatory propaganda schemes. These approaches can be categorized as promotive/preventive and preemptive. The former refer to those which promote a community harmony, thereby making inflammatory, manipulative tactics aimed at fomenting violence less effective. The latter include those which preempt incipient violence during a particularly volatile period. These activities require an ability to identify, in the words of Fr. Prakash, "the lull before the storm."

Use of promotive/preventive approaches have largely been in the slums where the Society has an established presence. Preemptive activities, on the other hand, have been used in much wider fora.

Interview with Fr. Cedric Prakash, Ahmedabad, India, 24 August 1994.

Promotive/Preventive Tactics

Street Plays

Street plays use the power of theater as a means of counteracting emotional appeals for violence with rational arguments against it. Some of them also have the effect of fostering an emotional catharsis. A central theme of the plays has been that the people who are hurt most by riots are the slum dwellers themselves.

Two underlying traits of the plays are relevancy and simplicity. Each play has been tailored to a local situation. In the view of the staff of the Society, a play must use symbols and words which are common to the people at whom they are targeted. They must be changed regularly, incorporating new information and new symbology. In the Society's staff's view, to have professional playwrights develop a play would ignore local idiosyncrasies. For street plays to be effective, they argue, the writers must have intimate knowledge of the community.

During the writing of the initial street play during a staff workshop in 1991, a consultant provided guidance on the processes whereby such art-forms are created. The staff, however, wrote the play. Staff members divided themselves into groups and presented their versions. Finally, a script was written by borrowing the best ideas from each of the various presentations. Since then, no street play trainer/consultant has been used. As Fr. Prakash put it, "the street play trainer was a very creative person, and that was essential to the process. But she didn't know the slums too well."

Slum dwellers themselves have also been involved in the creation of street plays, the script of which evolves over time. Indeed, according to staff of the Society, for a street play to be effective, it must be "organic." Such plays, they argue, are even more appealing to slum dwellers than television. Despite their poverty, television viewing is somewhat common among slum dwellers. But the television programs are, the staff members point out, "far away....[in contrast] with street plays, we are using their idioms, their folklore, their customs, their phrases, their words, their myths. They are seeing themselves in the play. The play is real, not artificial."

The other important trait, simplicity, is important because, as Fr. Prakash puts it: "The whole idea of a street play is that people are able to imbibe the meaning with simple phrases, simple verses, simple rhythms."

Street plays are used when tension is increasing, after violent uprisings, or as a means of keeping the importance of communal harmony in front of people.

One of the more popular plays, called "Manasjat," dramatizes the etiology of riots in rhythmical fashion.¹⁷ It has been performed on college campuses and in numerous slums. (The script appears in the appendix.)

For a brief description of the play, see S.D. Desai, "Darkness at noon," Times of India, 26 February 1993.

Creative Competition

For the past three years, the Society sponsored an art competition for slum children on the harmony theme. The idea is to create an awareness about the evils of sectarian violence in a fashion that is fun for children. The number of participants has increased yearly. Children are provided with drawing paper, water colors or crayons. In February 1993, roughly 50 children participated.

Another form of creative competition is cultivated by sponsoring an essay, poetry and poster making contest. Roughly 100 students from a local Catholic high school participated in 1993.

A similar approach was used by the press. For instance, in December 1993, the Ahmedabad edition of the national English language Indian Express newspaper sponsored competition for excellence in public service advertising. One emphasis of this competition was communal harmony. Assuming a causal relationship between the creative competition of the Society and that of the press is, perhaps, dubious. Clearly, though, the Society's work was known by the Indian Express editors in that Fr. Prakash was asked to be a judge in the newspaper's communal harmony competition.

People's Festivals

Every March, the Society, in collaboration with other local organizations, has conducted a "People's Festival." In 1993, the focus was "harmony." Whereas in previous years a community meal had been provided, in 1993 snacks were given in a plastic sack on which a song was printed. The song, written by the staff of the Society, was introduced throughout the festival. It is sung in Gujarati. The translation into English does an injustice to the linguistic rhythm:

Here is the message of communal harmony
Allah and Ishwar are one
Do not fight over a temple or mosque
Politicians fight for power
The huts of the poor are set aflame
The lust for power is the fuel
Look at what has happened to our city
For someone's fault someone else is punished
If, we the people, live in harmony
Nobody will dare to disunite us
This is the message of communal harmony.

The plastic sacks are of inherent use to the slum dwellers. Many have kept their sacks and use it repeatedly. The song itself is sung widely throughout the city. For such a song to catch on, it is essential, according to Fr. Prakash, that the song have "an easy tune like a jingle."

Peace Committees

The Society cultivates the establishment of committees in each slum in which it has a major focus. The committees are a vehicle for activist participation and governance. There are three formal committees: a women's committee; a youth committee; and, a committee which functions as a board of

each slum's credit union. Each committee is registered with the government as an NGO. Each has elected officers (including a president, secretary and treasurer). With the exception of the women's committee, each is composed of both males and females.

In addition to the formal committees, each of the three main slums has other loosely knit, non-registered and non-officered informal committees. The core of each of these committees is composed of the leaders of the three formal committees who divide their responsibilities according to their interests. Other community members are also asked to participate. A guardian committee serves as a parent-teacher association relative to educational activities. A health committee focuses on sanitation as well as preventive and curative health programming. And, finally, a peace committee works as a focal point in efforts to prevent violence. The Society began forming these informal committees following the December 1992 riots.

It should be noted that these committees are by no means representative of the entire area. The Society does not enjoy 100 percent support in any of the slums. Therefore, these committees are designed to handle programmatic, not community, governance. In that sense, they are not political entities in a grassroots democratic sense. Instead, they are a mechanism designed to develop a consensus among activists, fora for expression, and a focal point around which to launch collective action. In addition, it is through the committees that the Society builds its credibility in the slum areas.

The people volunteering to serve on a loosely knit committee are essentially accepting responsibility in a given area. In terms of the peace committees, members are expected, according to Fr. Prakash, "to automatically safeguard the peace of the area...[they] must respond to propaganda at its very roots."

The Society simply encourages the formation of these committees. It does not seek to delineate their respective activities. As for the peace committees, the hope is that indigenous peacemaking will result.

According to Fr. Prakash, these committees are much more effective at reducing violence than those which are formed at the government/civic leader level.

Involvement with the Government

As mentioned previously, the government regularly requests the assistance of the Society following a riot. In addition, Fr. Prakash was appointed to an emergency response committee by the District Collector. In that capacity, he is notified immediately of any civil unrest and has official sanction to enter areas off limits to the public during such disturbances. He and other staff members of the Society are granted curfew passes which the police authorities honor.

Government ministers also periodically request to be present during food, medicine, and blanket distributions in relief camps following riots. The staff of the Society are aware of hidden agendas that politicians might have in participating in such activities. On the other hand, they feel that sometimes they have no choice. To say "no" would create ill-feeling. Therefore, unless the request is "too much," they go along with it. As explained by Fr. Prakash: "It is just a no-win situation. It is not

merely the possibility of ill-feeling being created but the work of communal harmony would be positively hampered if we did not accommodate in some way they using us for their political image."

It is important to make a distinction here between affiliation with high level civil servants versus politicians. To a large extent, the Society restricts itself to working in close collaboration with the former and tries to guard itself from close affiliation with the latter.

Integrating Harmony Messages into Other Program Activities

The Society conducted eight "camps" on issues ranging from general health, AIDS and tuberculosis between May 1992 and February 1993. These were funded by Catholic Relief Services. According to Fr. Prakash, these workshop camps provided an opportunity to discuss issues relating to communal violence in a forum that was non-threatening.

Symbolic Gestures for Peace

The Society periodically participates in social action activities designed to make a public cry for peace. This is often done in collaboration with other NGOs in the area. It has been the Society's experience that such public acts can provoke a violent response. In December 1992, for instance, following the riots resulting from the demolition of the Muslim Babri Masjid shrine, the staff of the Society joined other NGOs working in Ahmedabad in carrying placards in a silent peace demonstration near the town hall. They were approached by a group of 50 or so Hindus who tore their placards to pieces and threatened to hurt them if they did not disperse. As Fr. Prakash approached his vehicle, the mob cornered him and asked him why he had come to the demonstration. Fr. Prakash responded by saying "because I want peace." He was then beaten and told that he "had better go to Pakistan." In the background, someone yelled "kill." Fortunately, Fr. Prakash was able to break away and run. A passing scooterist saw Fr. Prakash and took him to safety.

Preemptive Tactics

Providing a Safe Haven

One of the earliest approaches used by the Society to prevent violence was to intervene prior to imminent hostilities in a disturbed community and provide safe haven in a church-affiliated building for a besieged minority. This approach was first used when the Society was founded in 1976, when a school building was used as a refuge for Muslims who were being attacked by a mob of more well-to-do Hindus.

This tactic requires considerable skill in mediation to convince the aggressive party to not pursue potential victims. In this capacity, Fr. Prakash feels that he has an advantage in being a Christian because his religion enhances his ability to be perceived as an objective third party during Muslim-Hindu confrontations. However, other, non-Christian staff of the Society and slum dwellers themselves also have played this role.

It should be noted that the mediation skill of slum dwellers is cultivated deliberately by the Society using role playing during various workshops (with members of formal committees, health workers being trained, etc.). These activities have no formal structure, nor is there a pre-set script or guidebook. Instead, the workshop facilitator uses improvisation and asks the participants to develop their own role play exercise.

As Fr. Prakash puts it, the Society's cultivation of indigenous peacekeeping is aimed mainly at modifying the "atmosphere" surrounding peoples' response to conflict, changing their "mindset" and cultivating their "confidence and courage to be able to do this."

"Myth Busting" Counter Inflammatory Propaganda Schemes

It appears that the propagation of myths is, both figuratively and literally, a fine art in some of the Ahmedabad slums. During particularly volatile periods, usually before a religious festival, political operatives (strangers to the area) pay slum children a rupee or two to hand out inflammatory "patrikas" ("brochures" or "hand bills"), designed to foment a violent uprising. Usually, the patrikas refer to other communities from another area, leaving people with no readily available way of ascertaining the facts surrounding the allegations. For instance, when Pakistan beats India in cricket, patrikas have been distributed which say that the Muslims of some other area have been cheering for Pakistan. Even though most of the people in the slums are illiterate, the novelty of receiving a piece of paper with a message for them leads them to ask a literate member of their community to read the patrika out loud.

The political operatives also hang huge posters and paint slogans on walls as a means of communicating their messages. The inflammatory messages often refer to "the other community" and what they have "done to our country," asking people not to patronize "their" shops.¹⁸

Once when such a cricket match myth was propagated, the Society's staff went into the communities and asked: "Have you seen any Muslims cheering?" (i.e. using a strategy of refutation by counter-example) and "If it is a good stroke [i.e. 'hit'] why can't you applaud it?" (i.e. appealing to collegial, sports-like sentiments). The essence of this strategy, according to Fr. Prakash, is "to counter false propaganda as soon as it takes off--bit by bit and point by point."¹⁹ Generally speaking, this is done by holding community meetings called by a peace committee.

It should be noted that myth busting occurs at an official level as well, with the media. K. N. Shelat, the District Collector, regularly briefs the press, especially when inter-faith tensions are high.

IV. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HARMONY APPROACH

Signs of Effectiveness

Empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this strategy is difficult to ascertain since knowing

Fr. Cedric Prakash, "Communal Violence and Its Impact on the Urban Poor," paper presented at a seminar on "Communal Violence and Communalism in Western India" organized by the Centre for Social Studies, Surat, India, February 1994, p. 8.

"Communal Violence and Its Impact on the Urban Poor," p. 12.

when violence is prevented requires proof that something did not happen which otherwise would have. However, there is some evidence of this nature. The Society feels that each of these are a direct result of its work:

- o On December 14, 1990, residents of the Miriyam-Bibi chawl of Gomtipur were attacked by police and militant Hindus from outside the area. 5,000 Muslims took refuge in St. Mary's Nursing Home during the middle of the night, after the police and a Hindu mob broke into their homes, raped some of their wives and murdered others. The nuns who run the nursing home called Fr. Prakash since they knew of the Society's work in communal harmony. He called the District Collector, who invoked his powers as executive magistrate, ordering the police to retreat and replacing them with the Army. The Army disbanded the mob of Hindus. Even though the Muslims discussed pursuing a jihad, they decided against it after discussing it with Fr. Prakash.
- o In January 1993, in Mahajan-no-Vando, middle-class Muslims who lived on the perimeters of the slum were planning to attack the Hindu slum dwellers following the destruction of the Ayodhya Mosque. Fr. Prakash heard about the imminent violence and went and spoke to the Muslim leaders. They knew him because of the Society's work in the slum. He told them that "these are poor people" and

that attacking them was not a good idea. He then contacted some influential Muslim friends, who put pressure on the Muslim leaders. The violence was prevented.

- o In Shahpur (one of the outreach slums), sometime during the winter of 1991-1992, a group of Hindus approached the area with the intent to kill the Muslims there. The Hindus who live there prevented the violence, saying "you kill us first." This is perhaps the best evidence of preventative tactics resulting in preemptive success because slum dwellers themselves took a mediation role. The Society did nothing. This was cultivated by the Shahpur peace committee members.

Empirical evidence of community harmony which staff members of the Society feel is reflective of their work which may or may not result in a reduction of communal violence includes:

- o **Rakhis** (a ceremonial bracelet signifying a protective sister-brother relationship)²⁰ have been given by Hindu women to Muslim men in the Mahajan-no-Vando community in 1993. This community had experienced communal violence leading up to a flag hoisting ceremony designed to promote communal harmony earlier that same year. In fact, at the ceremony, the tension was so high that staff members of the Society stood back in the anonymity of the crowd for fear of their own physical safety. The exchange of **rakhis**, therefore, signified a significant thaw in inter-faith relations.

There is a legend behind the exchange of rakhis. According to it, there was once a Hindu queen who was being attacked. She needed some strength from a Muslim ruler whom she asked for protection. When the Muslim ruler consented, the queen tied a rakhis around the Muslim's wrist.

- o There have been emotional reactions to street plays. Viewers often leave the plays in tears. In one instance, according to staff of the Society, a woman "went into hysterics." The staff of the Society argue that the plays are not intended to be recreational or entertaining. The plays are intended to help people face the truth, to make them think, to help them overcome petty jealousies and hatred. To the extent that catharsis is important to bringing about forgiveness, these emotional reactions (except, perhaps, the "hysterics") might be indicative of a positive impact for peace.
- o Majority Hindus have helped minority Muslims when the government has imposed a curfew in anticipation of a riot. Among people of the two faiths, food and water is shared, victims of looting are assisted, and those with injuries are taken to the hospital.
- o Whenever there are Hindu festivals in Ahmedabad, Muslims are invited and vice versa.
- o During a volatile time, a Hindu man was heard saying to a Muslim, "You are like my son. Whenever you feel threatened, you come to my house."
- o Hindus have been seen sitting on the door step of Muslim dwellings when Hindu communal passions were running high.
- o In one slum, after stones had been thrown maliciously, both Hindus and Muslims went to see who was throwing them rather than assuming it was someone of the other religion. They found that it had been someone from outside the community, thereby ameliorating any misunderstanding among slum dwellers.
- o Not only has the "harmony song" been sung throughout the city, the harmony theme has been embraced by other institutions of influence, namely the press. The fact that a major daily newspaper in Ahmedabad sponsored a harmony-related advertising competition suggests that a social marketing approach of this type can have an "agenda setting" function. The momentum within the community may be, at least to some extent, attributable to the work of the Society.
- o There is an element of agency-self flattery which suggests success in using street plays. Whereas they were started initially as a way to prevent violence or to help people with their emotions after a violent confrontation, the Society has expanded the use of street plays to new subjects. These include those focusing on problems related to liquor consumption, suicide prevention, and hygiene. The enthusiasm of the staff and the broad use of the approach suggest that at least the staff considers the conflict-related plays to be worthwhile.

Signs of Failure

Based on his experience, Fr. Prakash argues that the Society's approach has been successful in

overcoming tension resulting from social or political pressures and cajoling. But he argues that, despite all of the myth busting, trust building, and community committee harmony infrastructure that have been developed, religious symbols, when manipulated in certain ways, still seem to invoke an undesirable response in the slum areas in which the Society has worked.

Evidence that the strategy failed to prevent religious-symbol-related violence includes:

- o In December 1992, mob violence erupted in the Sankalitnagar and Mahajan-no-Vando slums (the latter of which had two Hindu youth who participated in the destruction of the Ayodhya Mosque). During this period, staff members of the Society were "hounded" out of the slums, despite the Society's years of extensive involvement in both communities. In commenting on the violence in Sankalitnagar, Fr. Prakash wrote that it "shook the very foundations of years of innovative and pioneering work done by the [St. Xavier's Social Service Society] organization, in community development and in low-cost housing ...we were aghast as the minority community (which constituted a majority there)--hounded out the other few, who did not subscribe to their creed--and burnt most houses. We asked ourselves--'what has happened to the community organizations, which were so carefully nurtured over the years....?' Somewhere, something seriously had gone wrong." Indeed, communal hostility in the slums apparently spilled over into hostility toward other programs of the Society. Commenting on this, Fr. Prakash noted that in Mahajan-no-Vando "the people were apparently hostile to the INNED [education] classes being run there and the closest they came to cooperation was non-interference. We constantly had to run from pillar to post trying to get the people [to] make available a room or a shed to continue the INNED classes. We have not been successful in getting the parents/guardians to run the Nutrition Improvement Program in the area."²¹
- o In July, 1993, a tiny shrine on a main road of Ahmedabad near the Shahpur Fire Brigade Station was turned into a fairly large shrine overnight. Despite protests from the fire brigade officials that such a shrine could not stay on public property, the people of Nagori Kabarasthan were adamant that it not be torn down. People with whom the Society had worked for years were heard saying that they were willing to sacrifice their lives for the newly built shrine. Tensions ran high, but the local police were able to prevent a riot.²² The Society's staff, who had seen the tension evolve, considered the incident to reflect a failure of their approach since they had worked in the community for eight years, emphasizing the importance of keeping the peace, apparently to no avail.²³

"St. Xavier's Social Services Society, Report 1992-1993," p. 16.

It is noteworthy that the local police are trained in mediation. In fact, sometimes the Police Commissioner calls a meeting of community leaders in an effort to preempt conflict. Interview with K. N. Shelat, District Collector, Ahmedabad, 3 January 1995.

In a statement emphasizing the importance of the Society learning from its mistakes, Fr. Prakash wrote that the Society realizes "how difficult it is to promote true harmony at the grass-roots level."

"St. Xavier's Social Services Society, Report 1992-1993," p. 7.

V. ANALYSIS, QUESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Problem of Religious Symbols

Perhaps it is correct that this approach--as effective as it may be in using rational arguments to counter strong emotions--is only partially effective ("helpful, but not sufficient") when religious symbols are involved because, as Fr. Prakash put it, "emotion overtakes reason and fundamentalism exacerbates this tendency."²⁴

One must differentiate religious identities from religious symbols. On the one hand, there is violence between groups with different religious identities about non-religious issues. On the other, there is violence between groups with differing religious identities in which religious symbols are involved. The strategies employed by the society seem to be successful in the former, but not completely in the latter, case. So, when a riot between Hindus and Muslims is being encouraged via propaganda surrounding a cricket match between India and Pakistan, the foundation laid through this approach, along with a counter-propaganda scheme, tends to be successful in preventing violence, provided that the foundation is strong and the counter-propaganda is timely. On the other hand, when actual or potential destruction of a shrine is involved, the strategy doesn't seem to work, despite a firm foundation and explicit efforts to prevent an eruption of violence in a timely manner, save when it is combined with an effective policing action by the government. In short, the approach seems to work on its own to prevent violence among groups with differing religious identities when the issue is of secular, not religious, significance. It may be partially effective, as one among other approaches, in a situation involving religious symbols.

Perhaps this partial failure suggests that a focus on religious leaders--moolvis, swamis and the like--should be incorporated into the strategy, to the extent that those leaders can address effectively an attack on religious symbols which that community holds dear. Even though the Society cultivates community leadership through a committee system, it does not involve religious leaders in any systematic fashion, due, in part, according to Fr. Prakash, to the tendency for many religious leaders to exacerbate rather than seek to counteract communalism. He admits, however, that a selected group of religious leaders do help prevent violence. Therefore, involving religious leaders for the sake of communal harmony might be constructive when done selectively.

Defining Harmony Infrastructure

The Harmony approach, when viewed in its totality, is a multi-phased process. The relief and development activities of the Society constitute a foundation upon which to build a conflict prevention and mitigation program. The preventative tactics constitute a structure, a building of sorts, for peace. No single tactic stands on its own. Many different kinds can be used simultaneously. But the building, on its own, even if built well (with fire walls and the like, to continue the analogy), is ineffective. Right when there is a potential violent flash-point, preemptive tactics must be used, just as a fire suppression system (such as sprinklers) must put out the fire. The timing of the preemptive tactics are, by

It is important to make a distinction here between fundamentalism, which denotes the possession of strong beliefs based on the literal translation of a holy book, and religious militancy. Whether the existence of the former increases the propensity for the latter, of course, depends upon a host of factors and conditions.

definition, critical to their success.

The most magic of all moments is when there is spontaneous, indigenous preemptive action, when a slum dweller--a peace committee member or otherwise--stands up, at a time when violent passions are running high, and says something like "let's not be so stupid as to kill each other." To the extent that the strategy cultivates this, the magic of organic peacemaking is evident.

But, despite the existence of "magic moments" when there is heightened communal sensitivity to the undesirability of communal tension and violence, there is no magic in this strategy. The Harmony approach is not conducive to short-term, exogenous interventions. It requires long-term, sincere and effective community involvement in the more "bread and butter" areas of health, housing, sanitation and education as a basis upon which to build a fruitful conflict prevention and mitigation infrastructure.

According to Fr. Prakash, the NGO-community relationship goes through a series of stages, depicted in Figure 1. This can be viewed as a sequence of social acceptance which evolves during the laying of the foundation of the strategy.

Phase	Thoughts on the minds of community members:
I. SUSPICION	Are they genuine? Are they using us? Do they have political motives? Are they trying to convert us to their religion?
II. TRUST	They have helped us. They have been here for a long time. They seem to care about what we think.
III. HOSTILITY	They have been here a long time, but this is still a bad place to live. Should we believe the rumors we hear about these people, that they do not really have our interests at heart? It is irritating when they ask us what we are doing for ourselves.
IV. DOCILITY	We accept the proposition that we can make things better, but how?
V. HOPE	We don't believe what we have been told about other groups. We are willing to work together to make our community better.

Figure 1: Stages of the NGO-Community Relationship

Moving from Phase I to II is possible once genuineness is conveyed. Going from Phase II to III is reflective of a relationship being established. The transition from Phase III to IV results when people accept their own responsibility but are still lacking a collective sense of efficacy. The final transition is from *listening* to *doing*. It results from success in overcoming problems collectively, having a shared history and a common sense of efficacy.

Not only is trust necessary between the community and the NGO, but knowledge of the local situation is needed as well. As mentioned earlier, the street plays require intimate knowledge of the community if they are to be effective. They cannot be written by consultants from the outside.

The Role of Indigenous and International NGOs

It is unlikely that a newcomer NGO, especially a foreign NGO, would have the credibility and trust of the various communities to be able to develop a Harmony-type of approach to conflict prevention and mitigation. This strategy, therefore, is suitable for NGOs with established track records in relief and development, who have credibility with and the trust of the communities in which they work, and whose staffs are brave enough to literally risk their lives for the sake of peace. This is a tall order, for it requires not only programming excellence, but also demands the existence of a charismatic leader who is capable of cultivating a robust spirit of self-sacrifice among a group of staff members.

Some would argue that an "arms length" relationship between a foreign NGO and a local counterpart using a Harmony-type of approach is probably advisable, especially when the approach is being used to avert the effects of manipulation by a political party. Clearly, the provision of assistance from a foreign agency for activities to counter the efforts of a political party has the potential of raising the specter of foreign meddling in local or national affairs.

On the other hand, if what the political party is doing is despicable, then, one might ask, isn't it worth the risk? Is it not essentially taking a stand against organized crime?²⁵

In a sense, by virtue of funding and conducting a Harmony activity which, either subtly or not-so-subtly, accuses a political party of despicable behavior, both foreign and indigenous NGOs are opening themselves to a public relations battle comparable to nasty, negative political campaigns. Whether taking such a risk is advisable or not to a large extent depends on whether the NGOs can defend themselves with credibility. If a political party is conducting despicable activities and that is widely known, then one can assume Harmony activities, even those which can be reasonably construed as being partisan, can be defended. In such a case, the credibility damage to the NGOs can be prevented (or, at least, minimized), provided they are willing and able to refute a public affairs assault effectively.

Whether the foreign NGO directly funds the Harmony activities of the indigenous NGO or only supports relief and development activities, an accusation about foreign meddling can, of course, be leveled. However, in the former instance a rebuttal by an indigenous NGO to an accusation of foreign meddling is more difficult.

Integrating Harmony-type of consciousness-raising activities into other programs which are funded by a foreign NGO may have the same risks. For instance, to integrate Harmony messages into workshops on health which are funded by a foreign NGO creates a potential for a direct linkage between what can legitimately be seen as a partisan message with foreign support.

So, the risks are multiple. The question, though, is upon what basis does one calculate taking an advisable risk? In short, there are three questions both foreign and indigenous NGOs need to ask themselves before using or funding this strategy when a political party is involved. First, is what we are

In fact, in India, a group named the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and one linked to Muslim militants were accused of fomenting riots by cultivating communal hatred. Both were banned.

trying to counteract despicable? Second, are we willing to allow ourselves to be subjected to a public relations assault? And, third, will we be able to defend our actions effectively? If an NGO, whether international or indigenous, can answer all three of these questions affirmatively, then, from the standpoint of calculating risk, it would be neither reckless nor inadvisable, based on what this case study reveals, to adopt this strategy. Other factors (such as the willingness of the staff to participate), must, of course, be taken into consideration.

Staff Safety

Staff members of NGOs who get involved in a Harmony-type of project may, at times, risk being subjected to physical violence. Sometimes not saying the obvious is obvious. In the case of the Harmony approach, in the words of Fr. Prakash: "When St. Xavier's staff says that you are being manipulated and everyone knows it is a certain political party doing it, it can be a problem. The party takes offense. That is one of the risks we have to take. Anything like this is basically confrontationist."

It would be a stretch to say that the staff members of the Society are unanimous in their enthusiasm for Harmony activities. Once, during a staff discussion about the Harmony approach, Fr. Prakash asked the staff members if they were willing to live with the risks which such a strategy brings.

The staff members said nothing, but they smiled; some smiled nervously. Indeed, as discussed previously, some of the staff of the Society chose to stay in the anonymity of the crowd during the flag hoisting ceremony designed to promote communal harmony following the December-January riots of 1992-1993. Reflecting on it later, Fr. Prakash wrote that the staff had a "general fear of taking a stand for what is right and running the risk of 'personal equations' changing...during the ceremony, some of our staff were hardly involved--preferring to remain mere spectators--rather than take or encourage the people to take a responsible and positive role."²⁶ It should be noted, however, that the staff have never had threats leveled against them as individuals (such as an intimidating phone call at home).

Physical risk to staff must be put into perspective. In addition to potential violence, staff members face the threat of diseases on a daily basis. And, just as with disease, one needs to take precautions to reduce the risk of being beaten. According to the staff of the Society, these include: trying to stay away from large crowds whenever possible; not trying to mediate a large mob when there are too few police around for protection;²⁷ and, not asking people who have been recently dislocated by violence to go home (when they are filled with a high degree of insecurity).

Spreading the Use of the Approach

It would be instructive for NGOs, both international and indigenous, to nudge each other along in this direction. In fact, this seems to be the case in India.²⁸

"St. Xavier's Social Service Society, Report 1992-1993," p. 7.

This assumes, of course, that the police are professional in the sense that they will not take sides and become a belligerent force themselves.

For instance, in the summer of 1994, 46 participants in India from Maharashtra, Goa and Gujarat met for a three-day workshop on communalism which concluded that each organization should designate one person exclusively for anti-communal activities. The workshop, which convened NGO representatives, journalists, and academics, was organized by the Center for Social Studies in South Gujarat. According to Fr. Prakash, this type of "networking" activity specifically on communalism is rare. When there are

What is less clear is whether international NGOs could effectively use this approach themselves in an operational capacity. At a minimum, it would require a long term commitment to overall relief and development activities, with a Harmony-type of project being a "sociological externality" of the more "bread and butter" programs.

Third Party versus Same Party Arbitration

Fr. Prakash argues that he has an advantage in dealing with Muslim-Hindu violence in that he is a Christian. This raises a series of questions for agencies with a religious identity. Does this principle also hold when the violence is between different sects of a single other religion? What role can an agency play when one of the belligerent groups has the same religious identity as the agency's?

The Question of Abandoning Religiosity

There is a fundamental question of whether a strategy like this can or should "water down" the religious views of the various groups or, instead, should celebrate the diversity of those views. Fr. Prakash argues that the Society is attempting to get Muslims to be good Muslims and Hindus to be good Hindus. Of course, being a good, devout religious person is a matter of interpretation, but clearly one can highlight the faith components which venerate peace over violence. One would think that it would be more effective to help those with strong religious passions to channel those passions rather than to try to water them down.

The distinction here is between a religious melting pot, resulting in an indistinct grey matter, versus a spicy stew, in which the ingredients maintain largely their original shape and texture, but their combined flavor is better than what they taste like separately. One downplays religious diversity; the other celebrates it.

The question is whether a strategy which downplays religious differences is as effective as one that celebrates religious differences, especially when it is aimed at counteracting an influence which highlights religious differences as a means of fomenting prejudice and hatred. Does a downplaying approach, in a sense, ask people to abandon their firmly held religious beliefs, putting them into a sort of double bind of: "Do I maintain those beliefs which I hold dear and fight those who don't hold them, or do I abandon the beliefs I hold dear and not fight?" Is it not less cognitively dissonant to maintain the strongly held beliefs but to be helped to see them as something to celebrate in peaceful coexistence?

The question, as presented in Figure 2, is one of both effectiveness and desirability of moving from Psychological State A to B or C. Put a different way, the question is whether it is easier from a social intervention standpoint and more effective in the long run to employ a strategy which attempts to move people from point A to point C than from point A to point B. Is it likely to be more enduring in

such gatherings, the focus, he argues, tends to be on "what to do about conflict" rather than on "how to cultivate harmony." The workshop was reported in *Communalism Combat* (a periodic newspaper published in Bombay), Vol. 1, No. 12, July 1994, p. 11.

that it transforms the ammunition of the proponents of sectarian violence rather than smothering what seems to be an innate human tendency--religious passion?

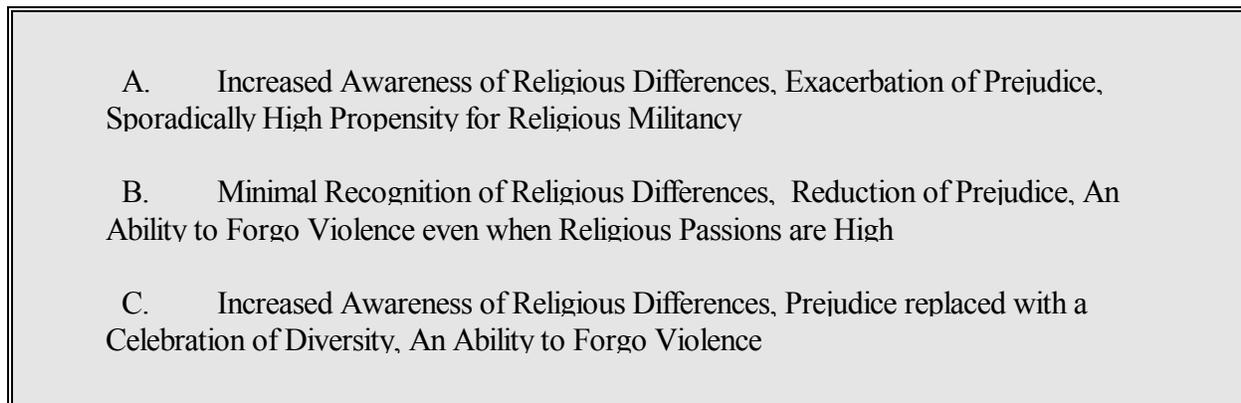


Figure 2: Three Psychological Stages

But one should not only look at this question from a psychological perspective. Spiritual beliefs and the use of spiritual disciplines may be critical to the success of this approach.

Constructive Alliances with Government Officials

To the extent that communal tension is generated deliberately by an opposition political party as a means of creating the impression of malaise and an inability to govern, the party in power will tend to be supportive of activities which mitigate that tension. But being linked too closely with any political party carries a risk of being viewed as partisan, partial and agenda promoting. Such alliances should probably be avoided.

On the other hand, building constructive working relationships with civil servants who are at least an arms length from direct political appointment can be extremely helpful (expeditious notification, curfew passes, and the like) and does not seem to have the same risks as a direct link with a political party.

This is not to say that an NGO should be apolitical. The objective, rather, is to not be partisan.²⁹ That said, there are exceptions to the general rule, such as in this case, when the activities of a political party pass the "despicable activities" test. Engaging the political process as an advocate for justice and human decency is, of course, appropriate and desirable.

International Advocacy

To the extent that organized, militant groups are receiving support from foreign sources, international NGOs could constructively engage themselves in advocating to their home governments

This principle is stated in "CRS Guidelines on Humanitarian Assistance in Conflict Situations," Unpublished Manuscript, December, 1991; revised April, 1992, p. 2.

to use diplomatic pressure to mitigate such activity.

Problems and Solutions at the Same Level

This case raises a "levels of intervention" question which seems to suggest that when violence is being fomented at the grassroots level, at least a part of the solution must be at the same level. That is, there is a problem-solution parity principle at play. This would suggest, for instance, that when violence is being fueled by what amounts to an international organized crime syndicate, then part of the solution needs to be at that level as well.³⁰

VI. CONCLUSION

In summary, this strategy requires *intimacy* in terms of knowing and being known in the community; *relevancy* in terms of the substance of the message; and, *simplicity* from the standpoint of the message's economy of communication. The increased sensitivity to the evils of sectarian violence which this strategy creates must be combined with preemptive actions for this strategy to be successful.

Overall, it seems to be effective in preventing or mitigating communal violence, though it may need to be combined with other approaches, especially when religious symbols are involved.

For a theoretical discussion about approaches used relative to the various levels, see William E. DeMars, *Helping People in a People's War: Humanitarian Organizations and the Ethiopian Conflict, 1980-1988* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1993).

This strategy does not offer a "quick fix." It seeks to cultivate indigenous peacemaking at the grassroots level. It is an approach built on trust and dedication, requiring a long-term commitment, programming excellence in relief and development activities, and a spirit of self-sacrifice on the part of staff members. In this sense, perhaps there is something to be learned from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concept of "cheap grace," that, in the final analysis, there really is no such thing as "cheap peace," either.³¹

Bonhoeffer's concept of "cheap grace" is explained in his *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1963), esp. pp. 43-114.

APPENDIX

THE MANASJAT STREET PLAY³²

A Scene of People:

(In a chawl--a better off slum--people are gathered, doing their own work. Children are playing.)

(Ranglo and Rangli start singing what amounts to the equivalent of a chorus in a Greek tragedy.)

Ranglo and Rangli: Look...look! Our society (Community)
 Our simple and humble society
 Our hard working society
 Where there is unity, there is harmony.
 And in harmony there is freedom.
 Where more hands get together
 There is greater strength.

(After the song a political leader comes into the chawl along with his two "goons" in typical political style.)

Two men: Long live Sir! Long live!
Ranglo: See, see, who is coming
Rangli: He comes with his two chamchas
Two men: Long live Sir, long live! (They go on shouting.)

The Scene of Samjuben's Meeting

(The chawl-people shouting--talking to each other, meeting.)

One: The "goonda" of the "leader" had come and ordered us to vacate our homes.
Two: They even offered us money as bribes.
Three: We were born here, our livelihood is here and we will continue to live here.
Four: And yes, if we are to stay far away then we would have to pay a lot for the to
 and fro bus fare.
Five: We have been living here since several years, how can we leave this place?
Six: They come only for the votes but there is no one to help us in times of
 difficulty.
Seven: Bad enough that we have to struggle for our own survival; now more pain is inflicted
 on us.
Samjuben: Dear brothers and sisters, we need to have unity among us. We have to stay
 together. We have to be one group. And as one body we must fight with them

This text of the "Manasjat" street play was "guided" by Hiren Gandhi and Saroop Dhruv (consultants to the Society). "Manus" literally means "humankind" and "jat" is the literal word for "caste," as in the Indian caste system. Hence, "Manasjat" means "the mold of humankind."

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only then nobody would be able to move us from here. But don't forget, be careful of bribery--don't fall into the trap of greed.

(The meeting continues in mime--the other side, the "leader" comes in a car. He points out to his henchmen the land which he wants to be vacated.)

Henchmen: We hail you, Sir!

Leader: Salute! Salute! (Angrily) Look here, this land is not merely land but a piece of gold I therefore want it within two days--understand?

Henchmen: But sir, what about these people...

Leader: do anything you want....Give money to them. If they don't take it, threaten them and even if they still don't agree burn everything in the name of religion and caste. Instigate the people that they may hate and kill each other.

Henchmen: It will be done sir it will be done....don't worry...

(The Leader goes away. On the other side the meeting gets over. The people talk to each other of "unity" and they go home to sleep.)

(Two "goondas" come with kerosene and set the chawls on fire...)

Daughter: Mummy, oh! Mummy, wake up! Wake up! There is fire in the house.

Mother: Oh! My God (shouting) HELP! HELP! Please come! Please help! (The daughter starts crying.)

First: We are destroyed!

Second: Oh! My daughter!

Third: Everything is burnt.

(People pour water and calm the fire.)

(Ranglo and Rangli come and sing a song.)

Ranglo and Rangli: From several generations
we have been set ablaze
we have been set ablaze

(Meanwhile the leader comes and isolates the mother and daughter.)

Leader: It is very bad. I am sad. Kindly take this money.

Mother: Uh! We have been looted. Everything we possess has been burnt.

Daughter: (Angrily) Get out from here! First you set us on fire then you come to console us. Get out! Otherwise something will happen.

(Exit)

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(In another corner the leader with his "goondas)

Leader: (To his men--angrily) Why are these people still here?

Henchmen Sir, they are not ready to accept any money.

Leader: Then make them fight and kill each other.

(Leader gives money to the "goondas" and leaves.)

(In two corners: One side are Hindu families and the other side are Muslim families.)

1st Henchman: (To a Hindu) Take this money for your daughter's marriage. You can celebrate it grandly. I am with you but be careful of those Muslims because I heard they are going to attack you.

2nd Henchman: (To a Muslim) Why do you look so disappointed?

Muslim: My son is very sick and I don't have money to take him to the hospital.

2nd Henchman: (Giving money) Take this money. Our leader has given it to you. I want to tell you one thing. Those Hindu people were planning to attack you all.

(The scene of Rathyatra--Maharamm Processions. Both the mobs get together in their area. They are in an angry mood.)

First Hindu: The big crowd of Muslims seem to come towards us.

Second Hindu: Let it come! We will see what happens.

Third Hindu: We have not worn bangles.

Fourth Hindu: Jai Shree Ram!

First Muslim: Hey! They are coming!

Second Muslim: Let them come. Who is frightened of them?

Third Muslim: Ya Allah!

(This time, the henchmen smile at each other and go.)

(From the mobs we can hear the sound of "Jai Ranchod," " Makhanchor" and "Badshahi Karbale, Ya Ali, Ya Ali." Both of the mobs come in front and stand.)

First Hindu: For years our Raths have been passing through this only.

Second Hindu: Our Ranchhodji will pass through this way only, today.

Third Hindu: Whatever may happen!

First Muslim: From centuries our Tajiyas have been passing through this way.

Second Muslim: Today it will pass through this way only.

Third Muslim: Ye Ali! Both the mobs fight each other--kill each other, injure each other.

(Sounds of shouting, crying and yelling.)

Ranglo and Rangli: (Singing)

One says it is my right
The other says it is mine
Humans say let us swallow each other

Hindu Woman: But why?

Muslim Woman: But for what?

Ranglo and Rangli: (Singing)
For peace and for selfish gain
To grab and to control
They learn and they teach
They sing and they make them sing
They see and they show
That is the nature of humankind.

Hindu Woman: But how?

Ranglo and Rangli: (Singing)
By instigating and inflaming passions
By dividing and ruling
By dividing and ruling

(After the song)

(Two people are carrying Hindu and Muslim relief camp boards. Hindus and Muslims go to their relief camp and sit. Meanwhile a social worker, Samjuben, comes to distribute some things and food. She consoles the people.)

First : We are looted!

Second: We are killed!

Third: Oh God! What happened?

Fourth: Now where will we go?

Fifth: We are on the footpath now.

Sixth: I don't want your blanket or oil. I want my brother. I want my brother!
(Crying)

(Meanwhile, the leader comes in a motorcar. He consoles everybody.)

Ranglo and Rangli: (Singing)
Here comes a total hypocrite
All dressed in political garb...

Leader: I am very sad with what happened. I cannot bear to see your state. Our country, India, is a democratic one. And in a democracy, we are all free to practice any

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religion. The Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhiji, said "Hindus and Muslims are like my two eyes. I promise that all who have been injured and looted will get Rs. 5000/- from my funds. (The chamchas tell others to clap.)

(This time some people in the relief camp show their anger towards the leader. They throw the ribbon they were given of identification of Hindu and Muslim. They hit the leader and say:)

All: Netaji Murdabad, Netaji Murdabad!

Ranglo and Rangli: We were one
We will always remain one
Manasjat...Manasjat!

All: (Singing)
We shall overcome.....MANASIAT

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