

Rajiv Bhagat's Project of Peace Plan:

1. Background:

The 2002 Gujarat riots have been described as being the deadliest communal clashes in modern Indian history, next only to those riots witnessed during partition in 1947. According to an Amnesty International report, more than 2000 Hindus and Muslims were killed in the state-wide violence that left 400,000 Gujarat residents homeless. Currently, the repercussions of the 2002 Gujarat riots continue to plague the Gujarat region. The ghettoization of Muslim residential and business communities is underway in all four of the Gujarat's largest cities, most noticeably in Rajkot. Nevertheless, despite this deterioration of Hindu-Muslim community relations in the city, many Muslim and Hindu residents still want to live in harmony. A new generation of young leaders from Hindu and Muslim communities who can value and understand the need for peace and unity can counter this rise of violent aggression and separatism in the area.¹

2. Goals:

- a. My overall objective would be to develop and employ an education based program that can be implemented through some of the local schools in the Rajkot area to foster and facilitate a better understanding and promote cooperation and friendships between the local Hindus and Muslims within the Jungleshwar and Ganjiwala communities.
- b. This can be accomplished by providing the Jungleshwar and Ganjiwala community youths in this area of Rajkot with a basic skill set to challenge erroneous cultural stereotypes and myths, to respect cultural differences, and to find peaceful solutions to resolve complex conflict by providing them with an interactive training seminar conducted through the various schools within this local area.
- c. A more ambitious goal would be for the training program to gain acceptance in the larger community. If the program succeeded in our school district, we could potentially advertise the program to all school districts in Rajkot at the yearly Rajkot Education Board meeting. Eventually, we could even advertise this program to schools in other cities of the Gujarat state. Free press publicity of the program would also help spread the success of our program through the community. A local Times of India reporter Nayan Dave will be contacted in the event he has an interest in this "story."

3. Project Location, Coordinating Assistance, and Timeline:

- a. **Location:** My project will take place in Rajkot's low-income New Thorala school district located in between Jungleshwar, the largest Muslim residential ghetto in Rajkot, and the Hindu residential neighborhood of Ganjiwala.
- b. **Local Assistance:** I will be working on my project primarily with local school principals Mr. Bharatsingh Chudasma of the Khodiarkrupa School on 98 Ramnagar Society Road and Ms. Sheetal Joshi of St. Tulsi School on 4 Manharplot in New Thorala. I have worked with both principals before while volunteering at the Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in the area during the summer (2000 -2005). I also will be working with Kirit Shah, a school consultant who assisted me with my research study I conducted in the summer of 2006. It is my intent to form an organizational committee possibly consisting of some of the individuals mentioned above to assist and help me oversee the project plan.
- c. **Time frame:** While my initial full time involvement will be limited to an 8 week period over the summer (2007), it is my intent that once I have established the basic parameters of this project that we would be able to keep it going for at least the new 2007-2008 school year. I will establish a process before I leave Rajkot to receive periodic updates on the status of the project from members of the organizational committee.

4. The Methods:

The way I intend to achieve my objectives is by developing and implementing an interactive yearlong role-playing youth peace/coexistence class in about 15 secondary schools in this New Thorala district of Rajkot.

a. The Role-Playing Peace/Coexistence Class:

The class will be designed for 9-14 year old students, from my own research conducted last summer on Hindu-Muslim youth relations in Rajkot and information from my team members of secondary school principals regarding the

¹ Conclusions are based on 160 of my own research project interviews in Gujarati (local language). Last summer, winning Penn's South Asia Studies Undergraduate Research Award, I ran a Penn funded research project in the Rajkot area, examining the split in Hindu and Muslim relations in the area in relation to the split between Hindu and Muslim community youth following the 2002 riots.

organization of the school system and background of their students in the New Thorala area. Overall, this basic class design has to account for three practical considerations: 1) it has to be interactive to stimulate students and retain their interest for the class 2) it has to bring Hindu and Muslim students to physically work together 3) it has to tackle the Hindu-Muslim conflict indirectly due to the sensitivity of issue in the area.

- b. General Class Structure:** Each 45 minute class will be organized as follows: 10 min setting, 20 min acting and commentary, and 15 min review. The instructor will begin the class by setting up the skit, handing out the topic to participating student actors to dress up for and prepare the scene, and narrating the setting to the student audience. The role of being actors/audience for class students will switch every class. Then, the student actors will enact the conflict scene and the student audience will be asked by the instructor to identify the conflict, to find the reason behind the conflict, to comment on their perception of each conflict participant, and a possible solution to the conflict. The instructor will also take photographs of the performances. In the final review session, the actors will also discuss their own thoughts and feelings being participants in the conflict and compare their thoughts to the student audience thoughts. The instructor will then guide students with a short handout fully analyzing the conflict, understanding the stereotypes and myths involved. Students will note down their experience in their journals.
- c. The General Curriculum Structure (29 weeks = 1 school year):** The general guideline (subject to revision based on what our experience dictates) will be as follows:
 - The first 9 weeks will form the foundation of the course. Students will perform simple, common conflicts they can easily act and understand. These conflicts will include interfamily conflicts, intercommunity conflicts, and generational conflicts.
 - The next 13 weeks students will start to perform much more complex situations: real historical minority vs. majority global conflicts, such as the African American-White conflict in 1960's in the US, taking up 2-3 classes/ conflict. Instructors will provide biographical information on actual peace leaders for each conflict and urge students to look back to simple conflicts to analyze the complex conflicts.
 - In the final 7 weeks, instructor will help students put together their own complex skits with their own analysis to be presented to other students within this setting

5. Implementation:

I plan to arrive in Rajkot on or around May 15th after my last final exam at Penn. I plan to accomplish the following goals in that 5 week timeframe.

- a.** Set up an organizational committee to assist and guide me on my project. Have the detailed curriculum finalized and printed: I plan to write up a complete class-by-class curriculum, including detailed instructions for the instructor to lead each role-play and the instructional materials distributed to students for that role-play. I will have Principals Bharatsingh Chudasma and Sheetal Joshi, along with their teaching staffs, read over the curriculum thoroughly to give me their thoughts and suggestions. More importantly, I will also ask them to help me to accurately translate my curriculum written in English into Gujarati. The curriculum will be printed and prepared for the teachers in a binder.
- b.** Meet with Trustees and local school authorities to seek approvals to allow our seminar style class to be presented to the students in their schools for a 45 minute mandatory time slot/week for students in grades 7-9. (Principals Bharatsingh Chudasma and Sheetal Joshi have close contacts with principals and trustees of the majority of schools in the district and have agreed to help set-up the meetings and promote my program to their fellow administrative peers)
- c.** Try and get approvals from at least 15 schools
- d.** Recruit and train teachers so that they are ready to teach the curriculum: Both principals have specifically have agreed to provide me with several recommended teachers from the area I could interview and hire. The final candidates and their qualifications will be decided by the organizational committee.
- e.** Purchase supplies and training materials including copies of the curriculum for the 15 schools where we intend to run this program for a 1 month period.
- f.** Since the schools start on or around mid June (summer vacation break), it is my intention to attend a few weeks of classes. I will remain in Rajkot till about mid July, sitting in each class during the week, and discussing improvements needed in the class with teachers on weekends.
- g.** Try and meet with local reporters to see if they would have an interest in providing periodic press updates.
- h.** After I leave, the local members of the organizational committee will continue to monitor the classes and hold discussion sessions which I will track on a weekly basis via telephone, email and written status reports.