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### The Hindu-Muslim Conflict: A Pilot Study of Peacebuilding in Gujarat, India

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## BRIEF REPORT

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# The Hindu–Muslim Conflict: A Pilot Study of Peacebuilding in Gujarat, India

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Deep within the religious–political context of India is the Hindu–Muslim conflict. This tension continues with ever-increasing violent acts being carried out in the name of religion. As recently as February 2002, violence erupted between Hindus and Muslims in the state of Gujarat. Gujarati citizens remain concerned about the reemergence of such violence. As a result, in this pilot, qualitative study, we investigated Hindu and Muslim perceptions about the causes of violence in Gujarat, and individuals' beliefs about solutions for peacebuilding between these two groups. Thirteen main themes emerged from the semistructured interviews (e.g., prior and present Hindu–Muslim relationships, perpetrators of violence, kinds of violence, consequences of violence, hopes for future, solutions for peace). Given these themes, we present preliminary recommendations for peacebuilding between Hindus and Muslims, along with suggestions for future research on this topic.

India gained its independence from British rule on August 15th, 1947. Amidst the zeal of independence were the Hindu–Muslim riots (Zakaria, 1996). These riots accompanied the creation of two separate nations—India and Pakistan (Hardgrave, 1994)—and were between persons leaving and resettling in the newly formed nations. Currently, India is composed of diverse religious groups coexisting with one another despite divergent ideologies and identities (Mitra, 2001). Embedded deep within the religious–political context of this country is the Hindu–Muslim conflict. This tension continues even to the present day, with

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ever-increasing conflicts and violent acts being carried out in the name of religion (Bacchetta, 2000; Kothari, 2002; Roy, 2002; Spodek, 1989).

We conducted an exploratory study of various aspects of the Hindu–Muslim conflict reported by a small sample of persons living in Valodara in the state of Gujarat, one of the cities reporting high rates of Hindu–Muslim violence (Varshney, 2002). As recently as February 2002, violence broke out between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat. Gujarat borders Pakistan and is one of the most industrialized states in India. The violence was triggered by an attack on a passenger train returning from Northern India. More than 1,000 people were killed, while many others were injured or displaced (People’s Union for Civil Liberties [PUCL], 2002). People in the State of Gujarat remain concerned about the reemergence of such violence (Helie et al., 2003).

While there have been attempts at reparation and judicial action by the state of Gujarat and the Central Indian governments, these endeavors have had only partial success in reestablishing peace and justice in the region (Helie et al., 2003). This article provides an initial investigation into the unique experiences and relationships of Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat who were affected by the violence in 2002, and, more important, it begins to explore some previously enacted and potential future solutions for peace between members of these groups.

While there is literature in psychology on ethno-political conflict around the world (e.g., Centeno, 2001; Gallagher, 2001; Kasaba, 2001; Oberschall, 2001; Staub, 2001), there are few sources devoted to Hindu–Muslim relations in India including very few documented instances of peacebuilding between Hindus and Muslims (Helie et al., 2003; PUCL, 2002). In general, the literature on Hindu–Muslim relations in India has focused on group identity based on religious affiliations (Kakar, 1996, 2000; Kanekar & Merchant, 1982; Majeed & Ghosh, 1982) and attributions each group makes toward the other (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Taylor & Jaggi, 1974). Researchers have suggested the Hindu tradition emphasizes the self, whereas the Islamic tradition stresses self-identity as nested in group membership (Kakar, 1996, 2000; Majeed & Ghosh, 1982). While this literature helps to explain the group identity of Hindus and Muslims, it does not address the strong ethno-political polarizations that lead to violence between these religious communities.

Perhaps some theories of ethno-political conflict found in the peace psychology literature might help to explain this particular conflict between Hindus and Muslims and also provide a context to understand and apply the data gathered in the current study. The realistic group conflict theory (RCT) introduced by Sherif (1966) proposes that intergroup relations, attitudes, and behaviors could be understood by examining the interdependence between two groups. Furthermore, the theory claims that negative attitudes arise when there is competition for limited resources or conflicts of interest, while positive attitudes emerge when there are superordinate goals. When applying this theory to the Hindu–Muslim conflict in Gujarat, examining certain factors such as economic resources and massive struc-

tural unemployment might help provide some insight. Spodek (1989), for example, suggests that competition for limited socioeconomic opportunities in urban settings has reinforced strong economic class polarizations, often regardless of religion. The current pilot study, therefore, explores whether economics may have influenced Hindu–Muslim relationships in Gujarat.

In comparison to RCT, the social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests in-group members are motivated to maintain biases toward an out-group so they may enhance a positive social identity, an assumption supported by Hewstone and Cairns' (2001) analysis of social categorization in Northern Ireland. Some support for SIT is based on perceptions of Hindus and Muslims toward one another (Bohra, 1979; Hagendoorn & Henke, 1991; Hewstone, Islam, & Judd, 1993). Kakar (1996, 2000) has suggested one possible explanation for the conflict as it relates to each group's perceived threat to its identity. To adapt to the changing environment, Hindus and Muslims strongly have identified with their own cultural groups to feel a sense of pride. In turn, the strengthening of each group's identity has promoted negative perceptions of the other group (Kakar, 1996). Data gathered from the current pilot study may provide support for Kakar's assumptions and also might offer initial support for SIT.

One other framework to help explain Hindu–Muslim relations is based on the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954). This hypothesis indicates cooperation between equal status groups working toward common goals leads to positive outcomes when there is institutional support for integration of the two groups and an opportunity to work with individual members of the other group. Allport argued that increased contact with the other group changes attitudes and can enhance members liking of one another. It is conceivable that assumptions tied to the contact hypothesis might prove useful when designing and implementing a possible framework for peacebuilding between Hindus and Muslims in India.

Clearly, there is a need to conduct additional research on Hindu–Muslim relationships, and, more importantly, identify potential peaceful solutions for reducing or preventing violence between members of each of these religious groups. Drawing from the theories just mentioned, the current pilot study was designed as a first step to explore these topics with a small sample of Hindus and Muslims residing in an area (Gujarat) in India that historically has experienced violence between these groups. Given the small number of participants in the study ( $N = 9$ ), we will describe the methodology only briefly.

## METHODS

### Participants

Participants were recruited through members of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Vadodara, Gujarat. They came from three neighborhoods identified as

mixed communities, where different religions (e.g., Hindu, Muslim, Christian) and castes (e.g., Dhobi, Rajput, Patel) lived together. At least one Hindu and one Muslim were recruited from each neighborhood. There were no pressures on individuals to participate; some potential participants chose not to be involved in the project.

While 15 participants were interviewed, due to technical failures with the audio-recording equipment, 6 interviews regrettably were lost. This resulted in 9 interviews, which were retained, coded, and analyzed. Of the 9 participants, 5 were Hindu (4 females; 1 male) and 4 Muslim (2 females; 2 males). The participants ranged in age from 22 years to 45 years. There were 2 unmarried women (Hindu), and the remaining 7 participants were married with children. Monthly income ranged from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 5,000 per month (approximately U.S.\$21–U.S.\$108; U.S.\$1 = Rupees 46). Education levels for women ranged from no formal education to a bachelor's degree and, for men, from 10th grade to a bachelor's degree and some graduate work.<sup>1</sup>

## Interviewers

Two part-time NGO members volunteered to be interviewers; both were women between the ages of 24–30 years, with bachelor degrees and more than 2 years of experience as fieldworkers. These interviewers received intensive training over a 2-day period in the rigors of conducting a qualitative interview, such as understanding the nature of semistructured interviews and being sensitive to nonverbal cues of the interviewees. Additionally, the interviewers were trained to record notes and to maintain field journals on the process and content of experiences during the interview (Koch, 1994).

## Procedure

The semistructured interview was formatted around certain topical areas, such as the history of Hindu–Muslim relations in the neighborhood, various experiences of participants and their families during the violence of 2002, participants' reflections on present relationships between Hindus and Muslims, and possible solutions to peace in their neighborhood. It was determined through discussions among the researchers that a focus on past, present, and future Hindu–Muslim relationships would help to understand peacebuilding in the context of Gujarat. Sample protocol questions included the following: (1) How would you describe your relations with people from other religious groups in your locality/mohalla? Do you celebrate festivals together? Do you visit each other's houses? Do your children go to the same schools? (2) How would you describe the Hindu–Muslim relations in

<sup>1</sup>Additional information about the methodology can be obtained from the authors.

this area? If these were peaceful/good relations, what in your view maintained these peaceful relations? If the relations had tense undercurrents or were always tense, what in your view contributed to these tensions? (3) Currently, what feelings/emotions do you have toward your neighbors, friends, and/or colleagues from the other community? Do you have contact with them? In what settings? How do you perceive them? How do you believe they perceive you?

All the interviews were conducted in Gujarati or Hindi. All assurances of maintaining confidentiality of the participant were made. Safe and secure places such as the participant's home or place of work were used as the location for conducting the interview. The interview team consisted of the interviewer, the recruiter, the primary researcher, and a *sathi* (companion), who was an NGO member. The *sathi's* role was to lend credibility and trustworthiness to the research study.

The interviewer began with an explanation of the project, the benefits and risks of participating, and the approximate time for the interview (90–120 minutes). Once verbal informed consent was obtained, the interview was conducted and recorded on an audiotape. If, at any time, the interview appeared to be distressing to the participant, and the person decided she or he wanted to stop the interview, the interview was terminated and counseling services from a local agency were offered. This did not happen, however, during any of the interviews. At the end, the participant was thanked for his or her participation in the study and was told that counseling services from a local agency were available.

### Transcription and Translation

A transcriber, affiliated with the NGO and fluent in the two target languages, that is, Gujarati and Hindi, transcribed the audio form of the interviews into written text resulting in transcriptions. Subsequently, the interviews were translated into English by a woman with a bachelor's degree and fluent in Gujarati and English. The primary researcher made comparisons of the translated and audio versions of the interviews to ensure minimum loss of meaning. The major content of the interview was captured in the translation from Gujarati to English. The interviews conducted in Hindi—the primary researchers' native language—were retained in their original form, without translations into English.

### Text Analyses

*Training of research assistants.* Two doctoral student research assistants (RAs) assisted the primary researcher in analyses of the data. Each was fluent in Hindi and English. Over a period of 2 weeks, the RAs were trained by the primary researcher in qualitative research, guided by the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

*Data analyses.* The primary researcher and RAs worked on the process of indexing a randomly chosen interview transcribed in a text form. Indexing acts as a heuristic device to clarify the frequency of certain words or phrases that might occur across the interviews (Seale, 1999). Once indexed words/phrases were identified, the coders went through the interview again to evaluate the stability of these indexed words/phrases, which then were used to form themes (Bernard, 2002). Themes identified in this study represented such ideas as Hindu–Muslim relations prior to the 2002 violence, effects of the violence on family and friends, roles of different people or groups, the desire to participate in change, and viewing oneself as a part of the solutions for peace. A reanalysis of the data during discussions between the primary researcher and RAs helped modify and reevaluate the emerging themes.

The three coders worked independently to code the rest of the text forms of the interviews using the indexed themes identified as a framework. Apart from these basic indexed themes, each interview revealed some unique themes specific to certain interviews. These specific themes were coded and retained as part of the results. The data resulting from a reliability process were used to assess interrater agreement ( $\kappa$ ). The obtained Cohen's kappa was in the "very good to perfect range" (.80–1.00) for the main indexed themes, whereas the additional themes that were unique to 5 of the interviews resulted in "moderate" agreement (.40–.60). In instances where the interrater agreement was moderate, the coders engaged in discussions to arrive at some form of agreement as to which category or theme fit best. The resulting agreements were coded again, thus raising Cohen's kappa to the "very good to perfect" range (.80–1.00).

## RESULTS

The process of indexing described earlier resulted in 13 main themes, which were coded for all interviews and 5 additional unique themes that emerged from some of the interviews. Results will be discussed in terms of the 13 themes common to most of the participants. These themes reflect the topical areas of the interview protocol. Some additional themes unique to a subset of the interviews also will be discussed.

### Overall Themes

*Prior relationships between Hindus and Muslims.* Prior to violence in 2002, participants ( $n = 9$ ) commented on the relationships between the Hindus and Muslims. Participants spoke of instances of harmony, such as "We were like a family" or "No one would differentiate between Hindus and Muslims." Some participants mentioned sharing between the Hindus and Muslims in their neighborhood

(i.e., eating food together, giving gifts), and visits to each other's houses with food and gifts, especially during the celebrations of Hindu and Muslim festivals.

*Perpetrators of the violence.* Participants ( $n = 8$ ) reflected on who and what they believed to be responsible for the violence in their neighborhood during 2002. Some responses suggested participants did not know who created the chaos in their neighborhood, stating they “did not see anyone” or “The trouble-maker is always an outside person ... after the riots, these people disappear.” Other responses indicated theories participants held as to who was responsible for the violence, such as those “who are less educated and unemployed are creating the riots” and “unemployed people start all these riots.”

*Role of different groups.* Participants ( $n = 6$ ) addressed roles different groups, organizations, and institutions played during and after the violence. They mentioned those who had negative impacts (e.g., the police “arrested people instead of taking into consideration whether they are culprits or not”) and positive (e.g., an NGO called the People's Union for Civil Liberties [PUCL], which “came and helped people who needed help”) impacts on their neighborhood. This category contained a range of groups, organizations, and institutions (e.g., police, media, politicians, government, neighborhood members).

*Kinds of violence.* Participants ( $n = 6$ ) described the kinds of violence they had experienced or witnessed during 2002, from stone-throwing to robbery and theft, burning of particular shops where “not a single store of Hindu was plundered, always Muslim shops were plundered,” and acts of physical aggression where “people were burnt alive” and “not only were the police firing, but so were private citizens.”

*Internal displacement.* Muslim participants ( $n = 4$ ) spoke about the periods of time during the violence in 2002 when they and their families had to leave their homes and seek refuge in makeshift camps. Hindu participants ( $n = 5$ ) stated that while they did not have to leave their homes, they did notice their neighbors (both Hindus and Muslims) moving out. All participants ( $n = 9$ ) stated that even though the people had returned to their homes after their neighborhoods were secured by the police, now “out of fear some people have left their homes,” and “those who are in minority are afraid, and they get frightened and leave their house.”

*Effects on family and friends.* Some participants ( $n = 4$ ) spoke about the effects of the violence between the Hindus and Muslims on their family members. They indicated that “families are dispersed and where children or parents are, no one knows,” “everyone has suffered,” and “if I have to go anywhere, ... I feel that I should take the family along everywhere so that we could be together.”

*Economic effects (livelihood).* All participants ( $n = 9$ ) were daily wage earners and thus, both during and after the violence, experienced economic hardships. One stated, "During the riots, people were stranded in the house and no one can go for work." Two years after the violence, participants spoke of the continual hardships faced by daily wage earners and "because of the riots, there have been effects on business. ... I have lost 50% of my clients."

*Atmosphere.* Participants referred to the current neighborhood atmosphere that emerged from the violence of 2002. Some spoke of the unpredictability of tensions between the Hindus and Muslims, making references to possible incidents during an upcoming festival, saying, "Both sides do have fear, plenty of it." Some participants stated, "At present there is no trouble," but "if there is peaceful atmosphere, many youngsters are enthusiastic that something should happen, they start throwing stones."

*Present relationships between Hindus and Muslims.* This category consisted of a range of participant responses ( $n = 9$ ) from a breakdown of trust between Hindus and Muslims, to friendships that have remained as before the violence of 2002. One participant commented on the deterioration of relations as, "Now we have sown the seed of violence and it will grow like anything." Others referred to more cautious relations: "First we used to go to each other's place but now we don't go." Some saw the absence of violence in the neighborhoods as a reflection of positive relations between Hindus and Muslims and acknowledged that "when there are riots, our relations are like enemies. ... When there are no riots our relations are good." Other participants stated, "[We] are staying together and we are friends," "[visiting each other during festivals such as] Diwali with presents. ... We go to meet them [Muslims] for Eid [a Muslim religious festival]."

*Hopes for the future.* Participants reflected on their hopes for the future for their families, for their neighborhood, and for the other religious community. There were reflections like, "We wish good for our family and that our children should study far and get good jobs," and "One only wants daily bread and peace." Some reflected on maintaining good relations with other religions and "We now wish we should live in peace like we did before." Two participants captured this by the statement, "We wish all the best for other religions and they should wish the best for us" and "I hope for the future that the next generation which comes should live in harmony and peacefully."

*Who is responsible for peace?* Some participants ( $n = 4$ ) commented that it is the responsibility of every person in the neighborhood to maintain peace, even though at times this might be a challenge as, "In our society [neighborhood] nobody has time to see that there is peace; everybody is engrossed in their daily

work.” A few participants spoke about joining organizations or peace committees to prevent violence: “Peace has to be created from both sides.”

*Teaching the future generations.* Participants ( $n = 6$ ) placed an emphasis on the kind of ideology that was being passed on to future generations. One believed that “if we live in harmonious brotherhood it is good for future generations,” with special emphasis on the role of the older generation to “teach the younger generation to live in peace and happiness.” Another stated, “I only want to add that any Hindu or Muslim or from any other religion should remember that this is our world and it is our family.”

*Solutions for peace.* Participants ( $n = 9$ ) responded to questions related to peace between Hindus and Muslims in their neighborhood, and solutions they would consider that might bring about peace in their neighborhood. The safety and security of the neighborhood was stated as important in maintaining peace, as “Only if there is safety can a man survive; otherwise he will perish. . . . Safety is the first thought whether he is Hindu or Muslim.” Some mentioned social contact as a way to dissipate tensions: “If we keep calling to each other’s place, the original relations will be maintained.” Others spoke about arranging meetings in the neighborhood: “We should bring people together and arrange a meeting of Hindus and Muslims. At least twice in the month there should be a meeting.” These meetings could be social events such as “During festivals, a picnic or party should be organized so that people gather together.” At a state and national level, some suggested the government and media could play a role: “Government should promote in the media things like serials, movies [about communal harmony]; then there will be good relations among the people” and “. . .the newspapers should [also] give good news so that there would be a positive effect on the people.”

### Additional Themes

*Comments on Muslims.* Some participants ( $n = 5$ ) made observations about the Muslim community stating, “They [Muslims] only want peace,” and “Those Muslims with whom we do business also say that they do not want to fight.” A Muslim participant felt that “there is no value for us [Muslims] here [in India]”; however, a Hindu participant stated, “We would not like them to leave. . . . They should stay here like one of us.”

*Comments on Hindus.* One participant stated some apprehension with Hindus reporting that “they [Hindus] said that however many Muslims are there, they [Muslims] should be removed.”

## DISCUSSION

The cause of conflict between the Hindus and Muslims is complex and involves multiple identities of the Indian people. To sustain peaceful communities, there is a need to include different participants—from the grassroots to the powerful, all levels of a society—to give voice to their diverse hopes and demands (Gerstein, 2005; Karam, 2001). This pilot study encouraged a few Hindus and Muslims affected by the violence in Gujarat to tell their stories and solutions for peacebuilding in their neighborhoods.

Based on our content analyses, several focal areas emerged warranting further investigation. One area was the indication by Hindus and Muslims that while there was an absence of violence in their neighborhoods, there were continuing fears about the reemergence of violence. Consistent with realistic group conflict theory (Pocha, 2002; Sherif, 1966; Spodek, 1989), participants noted that conditions such as decreased economic prosperity and political conflicts tended to sustain fears of renewed intergroup conflict. Such fears have the potential of obviating economic growth and prosperity, promoting social polarization, and sustaining the movement of residents to religiously segregated neighborhoods. In fact, participants in this study did identify the movement of residents to more religiously segregated neighborhoods.

Another distinct theme was participants' recommendations on ways to minimize mistrust between the two communities. Consistent with the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), participants mentioned events like hosting monthly community meetings, organizing community picnics, and celebrating each other's festivals as strategies to increase trust and cooperation and reduce conflict. These recommendations are consistent with those of Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux (2005), who suggested the optimal form of contact is intergroup relations taking place in everyday settings.

With reference to current Hindu-Muslim relations, participants reported a mixture of viewpoints. Some suggested the 2002 violence had brought a strong distrust between the two groups. This view existed even when the perpetrators of violence were from outside their neighborhood, suggesting potential support for the basic assumption of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Other persons indicated relations had returned to previolence times, where there were friendships between the two religious groups, a finding inconsistent with Kakar's (1996) assumptions about negative relations between these two groups. Despite these divergent views on Hindu-Muslim relations, participants expressed their hopes for a future of peace for their families and communities. Some persons suggested these hopes would help teach future generations to live in peace.

When speaking about peace and solutions for peace, participants reported they felt responsible for peace initiatives and welcomed opportunities to participate in community-building activities to promote peace in their neighborhoods. Viewing

community members as resources, social power may be mobilized by linking individuals from various groups to oppose violence and prevent intergroup conflict in their community (Montiel & Wessells, 2001).

While our results revealed some preliminary patterns in the conflict between Muslims and Hindus in Gujarat and some initial solutions to garner peace, we are very cautious about drawing conclusions from these findings. A small sample size ( $n = 9$ ) was employed, with an unequal number of males ( $n = 3$ ) and females ( $n = 6$ ) from the Hindu and Muslim communities. Other concerns with sample representation include the fact that participants were not from different socioeconomic levels within their neighborhoods and there were no participants from social or public leadership positions. Thus, the external generalizability of these results is unclear, suggesting the need for further research. Another limitation of this study relates to the interview protocol. It is conceivable that some topics or questions were omitted from the protocol. Therefore, participants may have reported other information about peacebuilding strategies, for example, if additional questions had been posed. A response bias also may have resulted from having all female interviewers.

Although the generalizability of the current results may be suspect, it appears the few Hindus and Muslims in this study reported they continue to live in economic and social uncertainties. These challenges also might contribute to other possible psychological concerns in the longer term such as anxiety, posttraumatic stress, and depression (Sekar et al., 2002). Regardless of the limitations of this study, there are some preliminary recommendations we can share based on participants' ideas and comments and the literature on violence prevention and peacebuilding. These suggestions emphasize how individual narratives can inform and even improve mechanisms for peacebuilding between different groups of people, especially Hindus and Muslims.

### Lessons From the Community

*Local participation.* Any nonviolent solution to peace rigorously must engage the active participation of the neighborhoods they are intended to serve. Community-based action initiatives are more likely to strengthen neighborhoods against such violence, especially if such initiatives are direct extensions of the roles community members play in their homes and in the community as peacebuilders (Montiel & Wessells, 2001). To develop community participation, it may be useful to consider the concept of collective efficacy (Sabol, Coulton, & Korbin, 2004), which emphasizes that personal and primary networks (e.g., family, friends, and neighbors) can serve as important community resources. Increasing social interactions between Hindu and Muslim neighbors may help to build a positive bridge between these groups, result in shared expectations, and eventually lead to mutually acceptable norms of violence prevention and public order.

*Seeking justice.* In the months and years following the violence in Gujarat in 2002, there were calls for juridical and economic justice for the victims of the violence, made by several leading activists and national and local NGOs through newspaper articles, report publications, and books (e.g., Helie et al., 2003). While there have been some financial reparations by the state and national Indian governments, Indians still perceive a level of injustice, as reported by PUCL (2002) and Helie and colleagues (2003). Some of the injustices shared by the current participants focus on the perpetrators of violence in Gujarat who continue to evade punishment for crimes they committed.

To assist the Hindu and Muslim communities in Gujarat in achieving justice, models such as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) might be employed (de la Rey, 2001). The tasks of the South African TRC included the identification of the causes of violations of human rights, granting amnesty to the perpetrators of violence, restoration of human rights, and recommendations for preventative measures against future violations (Boraine, 2000). The TRC engaged in the process of reconciliation through relationship building between individuals, between individuals and the group, and between groups (de la Rey, 2001). Provided there is a commitment to restoring justice in the state of Gujarat, its administration might be able to implement, for example, a series of smaller ad hoc committees in different neighborhoods to review the facts related to the violence that transpired in 2002.

Another aspect of justice that might be pursued and may be culturally appropriate is providing economic and social assistance. As participants in this study stated, economic hardships and challenges of the various neighborhoods continue to promote tension between Hindus and Muslims. Therefore, it might be helpful to provide neighborhoods with resources that could create economic stability. Local administrations and NGOs may be able to assist by offering Hindus and Muslims scholarships for technical training, job-training programs, entrepreneurial assistance, and employment opportunities. Providing other social services such as primary health care, schools for children, child-care facilities, local vocational schools, and access to parks and recreational grounds also might lead to the strengthening of the neighborhoods in Gujarat.

## CONCLUSION

This study raises the importance of conducting further research on peacebuilding and community participation in the cities in Gujarat affected by violence during 2002. Given the limited literature available on Hindu–Muslim relations and on the psychological well-being of communities in India, it is critical to encourage additional research on Hindu–Muslim relations. More importantly, it seems essential to encourage the development and implementation of effective strategies to estab-

lish peace between these two groups. Future research on peacebuilding between Hindus and Muslims should employ larger, more diverse samples where both Hindus and Muslims are asked to reflect on their own definitions of “peace.” Additionally, in divided societies where violence appears to be intermittent or continuous with low-level hostilities such as that witnessed in Gujarat, it would appear useful to implement multilevel interventions targeting economic, social, and political policies and structures. Direct interventions by local organizations could include activities like conflict resolution workshops for children, school-based programs in nonviolence, and programs at community centers where groups could perform street plays that challenge attitudes, prejudices, and other oppressive social practices.

At this time, the research on the violence in Gujarat and the strategies to achieve peace are in the early stages of development (Ahmed, 2004). There is still much to be learned about engaging such communities in their own peacebuilding efforts, as well as helping them find and implement indigenous solutions to their conflicts. The efforts of those who participated in this pilot study suggest that there is a willingness to do so.

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#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Jul Shankar earned her doctoral degree in counseling psychology from Ball State University. She also completed a doctoral internship in the University Counseling and Testing Center at the University of Oregon. Her interests are in multicultural issues, peace, and social justice.

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