

# *Binding the Bonds of Harmony*

**AWAG's  
efforts towards  
conflict resolution  
between  
Hindus and Muslims  
through  
SOCIAL RECONCILIATION**

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## 1. Social Reconciliation through Dialogue- An aspect of Conflict Resolution :

Gujarat's social fabric was torn in February 2002 and the tearing continued for some months. Scholars trace the history of such wear and tear to 1940s but it is now accepted fact that from February 2002 it was different kind of tearing. How different it was has been analyzed by many experts but the underlying current was 'the indoctrination of young Hindus who have been told to hate Muslims'<sup>1</sup>. This hatred was spread far and wide threatening the democratic and secular base of India. During the riots communal harmony was damaged, humanistic values were torn to shreds.

As an ngo, AWAG was concerned and wanted to do its mite. One of the tasks that was obvious was, to put in the words taken from 'Humanity at Cross roads in Gujarat, 2002,'<sup>2</sup> 'Promoting dialogue amongst the communities and social actors, countering the malicious and distorting lies spread through pamphlets, vernacular media and even school textbooks.

AWAG decided to promote dialogue amongst communities. AWAG had its interventions in both Harijan and Muslim communities for about two decades, with women. It was obvious to AWAG that the minds have been poisoned by both hate and fear of 'the Other'. AWAG decided that it could not remain passive when there was a need to heal, to stitch as it were, the torn fabric. May be, the stitches would show. But, may be, some healing would start, reconciliation could be tried by promoting dialogue and harmony could replace tensions.

In his book, 'Communal Rage in Secular India', Dr. Rafiq Zakaria has quoted a poem by Alama Iqbal, 'Naya Shawala' (pp 217-8). The poet hoped to build a temple of unity wherein,

Let us build a new temple of unity,  
The grandest, whose spears will reach the sky;  
'Let the devotees drink the elixir of unity,  
And sing the song binding the bonds of harmony'.

AWAG tried to 'break the barriers of separation to 'build a new temple of unity'<sup>3</sup>, and thereby **binding the bonds of harmony**.

The efforts of AWAG at socially reconciling Hindu Harijan and Muslim communities are documented here.

AWAG requests the readers to send in their comments, suggestions etc. These are welcome to light our future actions.

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<sup>1</sup> p 56, Zakaria R., 'Communal Rage in Secular India', Popular Prakashan, Mumbai.

<sup>2</sup> p 71, 'Humanity at Cross Roads in Gujarat 2002, the report of Behavioural Science Centre', St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad.

<sup>3</sup> p 218, phrases from Iqbal's poem "Naya Shawala", quoted by Dr. R. Zakaria, 'Communal Rage in Secular India', Popular Prakashan, Mumbai.

## 2. AWAG's Background :

AWAG launched a project of 'communal harmony' way back in 1986. During the devastating riots of 1985 AWAG was a fledgling which could not do more than relief work. In 1986 again, communal riots flared up in August in the wake of the Jagannath Rath Yatra and AWAG as an organisation, decided to be with the riot-torn women. AWAG began with visits to the relief camps, followed up with women's groups in Dariapur and Bapunagar. Women initially demanded peace and later, income-generation. Various actions were taken and the income-generation programme stuck to AWAG. Year after year, for three successive years, communal riots flared up in August in Ahmedabad.

Then in 1992 December there was a large flare-up. AWAG sat with Dalit and Muslim women's groups to analyze the riots and they came to conclude that they were not against their neighbours but a third group was responsible for the flare-up to which they contributed. AWAG then put together a two-days workshop for women and named it 'Manavta Bachao Shibir', 'a workshop on Save Humanity'.

The workshops could be replicated among Dalit groups but not in Muslim groups. Eventually we could gather Muslim women for 'meetings' and communicated the following :

- (1) Riots are started by third persons, not Hindu / Muslim neighbours.
- (2) Communities contribute because they are excited and somehow feel wronged by 'the Other' community.
- (3) We need not follow rumours and rush to places and crowd there. Crowding together means trouble, especially police shooting. Anyone can fall to the bullets and we lose our youths, young ones. So refrain from crowding, stop children. Do not be disturbed by rumours.

Such communication appears to have been fruitful. From 1993 to 2002 February, riots were reported in Dariapur in Ahmedabad. In late eighties as soon as riots flared up in Dariapur, Bapunagar would flare up. But not after 1993. From 1993 to February, 2002 no riots were reported in Bapunagar. This is a record in the history of Ahmedabad. Riots of 2002 February-March onwards were of different kind and Bapunagar also burned.

With this experience at the back of their minds, AWAG persons were wondering what could be done in the wake of the riots that flared up in 2002, February. We were depressed and worried, unable to plan further action in any direction for a long time.

### 3. In 2003

In a meeting AWAG's persons debated if any action by them could be of any consequence. There was so much of despondency that hope did not make its appearance. Worse was that we knew that most of the people whom we personally knew shared two sentences in common, 'Good, the Muslims were taught a lesson' and 'Now the Hindus will not have to be afraid of Muslims'. The ideology of hate appeared to have been firmly entrenched in the minds of Hindus of both the middle class and the poor. 'If this was the mindset of millions, how did one counter it' was the question debated.

Another question also loomed large. Whatever we do, shall we be able to stop next bout of riots ? We felt so very small so very inadequate, so very helpless that we were fully frustrated.

Yet, one had to do something. What was that 'something' ? What did we feel like doing ? Would something akin to 'Save Humanity' workshops serve the purpose ? Would such actions stop riots now ? The latest riot witnessed sudden attacks by large crowds on a community. The earlier ones were largely incited by an offensive action or two. We could argue with women's groups about keeping calm and not rushing out. The last time was different, so different that old strategies would not work.

The minds of people were full of hatred for a community. Various myths were circulating about increasing population of Muslims and their allegiance to another country viz. Pakistan. Each Muslim, it was stated, married four wives and begot eight children. A Muslim divorced his wife at will and the maintenance was paid by the Government of Gujarat because the Waqf Board which pays maintenance to deserted wives is fully supported by the State Government. And the government's money is our money. Why should we support their ex-wives ! The Muslim ate chickens and mutton so they were cruel and killed people. Such statements kept circulating, feeding hatred against Muslims who were being seen as devils.

To go against this tide was a gigantic task. Could one organisation think of turning the tide of hatred, of misinformation, of venomous and vehement running down of a community ? AWAG naturally felt inadequate. But did AWAG have to think about such result as stopping riots in future ? Or could AWAG set itself a lesser goal ?

Probably AWAG could do something to alleviate the sorrow and deep seated fear in the hearts of Harijan and Muslim women. Perhaps AWAG could meet the neighbours and both the communities together could re-establish normal relations

among one another. Should we try influencing the mindsets of people ? That would be a tall order but worth trying. How could that be done ? Bringing women of both the communities together was essential but that would not be, by itself, enough. Their prejudices, misconceptions or misinformation about one another had to be dissolved and replaced by human approach, mutual understanding and acceptance. Could we impact on their minds ? How was hatred to be removed ? What could reassure people about their security ?

AWAG reasoned that in order to achieve such results as change of mental attitudes, the target groups will have to be closely spoken to. In fact not only spoken to but will have to be led to accept a few positive concepts. This could be arrived at by analysing their situation, making them think things over, leading them towards mutual acceptance and then making them articulate their opinion towards reconciliation.

The riots had divided Hindus and Muslims. These divisions largely occurred among the poor. Harijans and Muslims have lived cheek by jowl in Ahmedabad city. They were turned against one another. The 'modus operandi' appeared to be that the hate campaign had proceeded and during riots messages were sent to start stoning etc. The messages were compelling, had to be obeyed.

When attackers took over, the neighbours ran away. Though the neighbours did not join in the bloody attack, they had initiated it and the hate lingered. A year later when AWAG was discussing its intervention, the people had returned but there was no acceptance of one another. 'Borders' were defined. Persons of one community did not frequent roads in localities which were populated by 'the Other' community. There was no mixing though the neighbours knew one another well.

AWAG was aware that women of both the communities had suffered. Both were poor. Prof. Amartya Sen, in his preface to Dr. R. Zakaria's book, 'Communal Rage in Secular India', has drawn attention to the fact that 'everyone has many identities, related not just to one's religion and community, but also to class, occupation, gender, political inclinations, and so on'. AWAG decided to build its dialogue on class and gender, their being similarly disadvantaged and their being women.

To bring Harijan and Muslim women together, their identities as poor and women had to be dwelt upon. Long days of curfew and living in fear had confined them within homes and they were unable to go out to earn. Debts had increased when mobility was threatened. Human approach had to be emphasized. Religion in its spiritual connotation had to be reestablished in their minds. Harijans have always

been non-vegetarians. Birth control is hardly practiced among them and a Harijan youth does not hesitate in taking a second wife if he wants to. A Harijan woman has to have divorce before she could remarry, in this she is as much disadvantaged as a Muslim woman.

If AWAG persons could handle all this, may be there was a hope. AWAG decided to give it a trial.

AWAG was conscious of the fact that it would not be able to stop rioting for ever. It was also aware that for an ngo that was a very tall order. But if the neighbours could accept one another as normal human beings without being fearful of one another, if they could live in peace together, that was worth trying.

While discussing this, one of us remembered a small poem by the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

'Who will do my work ?'

says the setting Sun.

The world of Nature

offers no answer.

A clay lamp speaks,

'O, Lord and Master !

I am willing to do

what little I can<sup>1</sup>.

AWAG compared itself to the tiny clay lamp and launched the workshops towards social reconciliation to do what little it could.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation from the original by Mr. William Radice.

## **4. An Effort Towards Social Reconciliation Workshops :**

### **(i) Introduction :**

Since the communities were alienated from each other it was planned to promote dialogue between them.

Towards this AWAG proposed sensitization of the communities through their women.

### **Training :**

AWAG's awareness raising and sensitization trainings have been developed as unifocus activity by a group of trainers who act as a team to achieve specific targets. The training team designs the module, chooses various components, decides upon exercises, games, stories, songs to be used when and how. The use of visuals, charts, growing designs on blackboard etc. is discussed in detail.

While dealing with illiterates and semiliterates, the trainers prepare for unexpected turns the discussions may take which could necessitate use of more material like visuals or some more illustrative stories or first person narratives. When such need arises the trainers do a quick consultation among themselves and use whatever is needed at the time. For example, the intention of the trainers was to form a committee of the participants after each workshop. Ordinarily the participants agree to share in future planning to disseminate the messages received by them during the workshop and to assist in execution. At the end of one workshop, not enough number of women came forward. So the trainer launched a story saying how people were going to comment whenever one does anything so one need not keep worrying about comments of others. The story of 'father, son and a colt' was handy enough to convince the hesitating group. The trainer achieved the result, some women volunteered to be on the committee.

A schedule is prepared as a general outline to be followed in successive workshops so that uniformity is achieved. However, as stated above, the trainers keep it flexible.

### **The Workshops :**

Workshops for 35 to 40 women of both the communities were planned. These were first to be exclusively of Hindus or Muslims and then a workshop inclusive of both groups were planned. The intention was to first discuss reactions to riots within a community. The two were not brought together initially. Since the apprehension on one hand was that anyone's strong vocal response against any other could be unhealthy and on the other, participants could adopt the tactic of providing subdued responses. It was decided that the sensitising team would meet both the groups separately first and then would organise a workshop for the mixed group.

In order to address the future generation it was decided to extend the effort to the groups of adolescent girls of the same areas. Once the elderly women were brought together and they accepted harmonious living together they would be asked to send their or their neighbours' daughters i.e. adolescent girls from their areas to us so that AWAG could establish dialogue with them as well.

**Objectives :**

- (1) Alleviate the feeling of hatred, concept of 'border' and deep seated fear from the minds of the participants.
- (2) Inculcate in the minds of the participants the spiritual values connected with religion, thus drawing them to humanitarian values.
- (3) Make the participants aware of their bonds as the poor and the women who suffered worse during disturbances.
- (4) Lead the participants so that they articulate their bonding.
- (5) Persuade the participants to send their or their neighbours' daughters i.e. adolescent girls for workshops to be organized by AWAG for them.
- (6) Organize interface meetings of the elderly women's groups and 'Friendship clubs' for adolescent girls' groups occasionally to continue the inter-community dialogue.

Harking back to 1986 when AWAG had gone to Bapunagar with the objective of 'Communal Harmony', AWAG had been active in the post-riots time in 2002 as well. Relief and rehabilitation actions were undertaken, trauma counselling was done. So it was decided to put in one more effort towards establishing harmony among neighbouring communities. That in itself could be an objective because that was necessary, Harijans and Muslims lived as neighbours and so had to be reconciled. The fear of the other had to be allayed and the borders had to be erased from their minds. They had to think about it, replace prejudices by understanding, change their mind set to accommodate humanitarian values and speak about that.

## (ii) Selection of Participants :

For the workshops we had chosen five areas of the city which had witnessed riots. In a given area our team went to the *chalis* (streets) and selected two or three women from each *chali*. One criteria we applied was that the person should not have attended any of our earlier workshops. This was so decided because we wanted to involve more women with us. On the day that they were selected they were also informed about place, date and time they should reach at for the workshop.

As those who went to enrol them unfolded the objectives of the proposed workshop, the women responded that they would join. Some did ask questions about the team members of AWAG as to where they lived, to which caste they belonged etc. One of the members was Muslim so some looked at her with suspicion.

In adolescent girls' workshops that followed, participants were sent by those who had participated with us. Otherwise adolescent girls could not have been brought together because girls are not sent out on their own by elders in the families. Since the elders came to know AWAG, relationship of mutual trust was built.

### (iii) The schedule :

It is pretty wellknown that women in Ahmedabad could comfortably attend workshops between 12 noon and 4.00 p.m. These four hours are certainly available, and may be, one could stretch it for half an hour. So the planning was for 4 hours with a short interval in the middle.

In sensitisation or awareness raising workshops we always insist on the duration of two days as we expect participants to sleep over what is said on day I, so that they could raise questions the next day if they found problems in accepting what was said during the day.

Moreover, certain statements made by the trainers could have been debatable and the participants need to debate them within self or with people at home. They would certainly share their experiences with family members because they were bound to ask her since her absence from home for so many hours was not normal happening. The family members would have their own comments which she could carry to the workshop on the next day. Her sharing of experience at home would lead others to comment and provide an opportunity to the trainer to further clarify concepts.

So duration was decided to be of two days, four hours on each day. Some time was to be allotted to registration, mutual introductions, introduction of our organization and stating the objectives of the workshop. On Day I all this was likely to take almost an hour.

For schedules used in the workshops, see ann. 1 & 2.

For adolescent girls the intervention was differently planned. On day I they would be invited to meet and be together. This was going to be for four hours, during which time introductions would be made and games would be played in groups. Next, the same group would be invited for a three days workshop. The third day was set aside for exposure trip which would allow time and space for mutual mixing.

The schedule for the two days of workshop would include their statement of their dreams, the constraints they experience in actuality. The restrictions imposed by their parents along with explanations of the parents' attitude and their own considered responses.

For the schedule used in the two days' workshops, see ann. 3.

#### **(iv) Exclusive Workshops Themes and Methods :**

##### **Unity :**

Since the objective was to reconcile the two communities and to lead them to harmonious living together the major theme was unity among communities. This had riots in the background as the divisive force. Riots were fanned by rumours so that too, had to be tackled. Moreover their poverty and their womanhood had to be underlined.

##### **Situation Now and Needs of the Day :**

Our perception was that communal harmony was necessary to live together in the city and to revitalize the economy of the state. 'Did the participants think so?' was the question. So it was decided to find out their own perception of what were their necessities. This would reflect on their poverty also. It was proposed to ask them to distribute themselves in four groups and to draw what they needed. Once the drawings were done, they would be asked to explain their choice of the themes of the drawings. That could make us understand their perception of the present situation. It would also make it clear to them that they suffered more because they were poor.

##### **Religion and Humanity :**

Then we sought to introduce 'Religion' and how in the name of religion their peace and that of the state was shattered. The participants would be asked to define religion. They could begin with rituals and could be led to the philosophical base of all religions.

To link up religion with humanity it was decided to use line drawing of a woman. The participants could add details. As a bindi gets added to the forehead of the drawing of a woman's face, the trainer picks up discussion. If the person did not have bindi would that make her a lesser human being or vice versa, if the person had bindi, then what ? Through the discussion the trainer could lead to the concept : 'Love and respect for life and human beings'.

##### **Rumours :**

'Rumours : their role in fanning Riots' would be taken up through an exercise. A message would be whispered in the ear of the person sitting next to the trainer who would ask her to repeat it to the person next to her. This would go full circle when the last person would repeat aloud what she had heard. That would be different from what was stated at first by the trainer. Second round of another message would be undertaken with instructions that if one was not sure what one had heard,

questions should be asked and then only message should be conveyed to the next person. Yet the message received by the last participant would be different. If within a room when there were opportunities to verify, words get distorted then what could happen in days of riots ? A rumour stating that a person was killed in a certain area could bring crowds out in another area more than ten kilometers away and stone-throwing could start ending in police firing and deaths. So 'beware of rumours' and 'don't join crowds', 'keep children and youth out of harm's way' would be the messages conveyed to the participants.

### **Personal Experiences :**

The participants would be asked to narrate their experiences. This would make some of them express their grief at the loss of life, or their perception of life during riots, the hardships they suffered from etc. Such narration would also bring out who they thought was to blame and how they felt about the other community. The exercise would prove to be an exhaust valve to bring out pent up feelings which at the same time would indicate their mental state and approach to riots.

### **Making informed choices in future :**

Discussion about how would they react if similar situation arose again was prefixed by an exercise. Pairs of participants were asked to participate. One of the pair would be a horse whose eyes would be blindfolded. The other person would 'drive' the horse guiding it by pressing fingers on the shoulders of the horse. After a few minutes of this they would be asked their experiences during the exercise. The horse would be very unhappy while the 'driver' would have enjoyed the position. 'Did not people blindly follow what some people started off? Should we always remain blindfolded and rush into situations which could only end in harming ourselves ?' Would be the questions raised for discussion.

### **Winding up :**

The discussion raised in the last session would aptly wind up the discussion as the group would realise that they need not be led to rioting in the name of religion.

The participants would then be asked to join in a workshop inclusive of both communities. They would be provided with details of time, date and place for the next workshop.

### (v) Inclusive workshops Themes and Methods :

The inclusive joint workshops were designed to reinforce the messages of peace and harmony communicated in the workshops held earlier exclusively for Hindus and Muslims.

Quick recapitulation of the concepts communicated in the earlier workshops was the first on agenda.

Next, the participants would be divided to draw '**My needs**' as before. The outcome would indicate the trainers if the messages conveyed in earlier workshops were well received.

The riots in which they were involved had impacted their lives to a very large extent. Discussions had to be led to the excessive harm such happenings brought on women and girls specifically.

On Day II, '**Mother Daughter Relationship**' would be taken up. A utensil with cover would be used to underline curiosity that we all share. This had to be used with reference to the curiosity adolescent girls had about developments in their body and mind. The theme had to be elaborately treated because AWAG wanted them to send their daughters to similar workshops.

Next **Women's Social Bondages** would be introduced. A visual depicting women's bondages would be used to generate discussion on the subservience of women. The intention was to make them assert themselves against the oppression within family and save their daughters from being entirely subordinated. The girls needed education and exposure though the post-riot environment did generate fear and suspicion.

The discussions would underline the oneness of participants as women.

The 'Tug of War' was proposed to provide an occasion to involve them in an exercise which could have no impact on their lives. The participants would be asked to join and they would join. It would be pointed out that they had joined similarly in riots. This exercise had no impact on their lives, while riots disturbed their lives heavily. They ought to think before joining any activity.

The participants would be asked to narrate their experiences which would make women of both communities aware of the suffering and would lead them to conclude that women were worst sufferers.

In the last session a women's committee would be organised which pledged to take the message of peace and harmony to their neighbourhood.

The members of Women's Committees would then be invited to attend interface meetings which would be organised by AWAG to continue inter-community dialogue.

## Participation in Inclusive Workshops :

Hindu women were ready to join the next workshop wherever it was held and on whichever date. Muslim women appeared reluctant. Twenty vocal persons were usually chosen and asked to join from the participants of the earlier exclusively Hindu workshop. All the Muslim women were asked to join from earlier exclusively Muslim workshop. While most of the Hindu women joined each of the 5 inclusive, 50% or less of Muslim women joined. Their numbers were almost equal in all inclusive workshops because of the strategy followed. Hindu women usually reached the place of the workshop on time while field workers had to call Muslim women from their homes. Despite that all did not come to attend the workshop. The reason appears to be that family of Hindu women does not stop them while that of Muslim women does. Muslims view meetings with suspicion and choose to stay away lest any harm should come out of such activity. They are fearful and feel insecure.

It was also found that Hindu women were more articulate and asserted themselves quickly. Muslim women were more recessive and spoke when they were specifically asked. Our impressions were that this was so because the Muslim were less educated and more poor. To check on this, our information about the participants of the first inclusive workshop was tabulated as follows :

Table no. 1 : Education of women as per religion in the first inclusive workshop

Schooling upto which class	Illiterate	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	Total
No. of Muslim women	12	-	-	01	-	01	01	-	-	15
No. of Hindu women	01	-	01	-	01	04	04	02	05	18

Table no. 2 Employment of women as per religion in the first inclusive workshop

	Housewives	Incense stick rolling	Bidi rolling	Stitching or embroidery	traders	Casual lab.	Total
No. of Muslim women	03	07	01	04	-	-	15
No. of Hindu women	07	03	02	06	-	-	18

In the inclusive workshop 12 Muslim women out of 15 were uneducated, while only one Hindu woman out of 18 was uneducated. Seven Hindu women could afford being only housewives as against three Muslim women. Large number of Muslim women are employed in ill paid work, while most of Hindu women are employed in better paid and clean work.

However, this was not so everywhere. In Jamalpur and Gol-limda areas where Muslim women were a little better educated and a little better off economically than their Harijan counterparts, they asserted themselves. In those groups Muslim women were more articulate, both groups were illiterate or semiliterate, but the Harijan women were more disadvantaged, as the following tables indicate.

Table no. 3 : Education of women as per religious community in the last inclusive workshop

Schooling upto which class	Illiterate	1 to 4	5 to 7	8 to 10	12 - 12+	<b>Total</b>
No. of Muslim women	-	03	04	04	05	<b>16</b>
No. of Hindu women	05	01	05	05	-	<b>16</b>

Table no. 4 : Employment of women as per religion in the last inclusive workshop

	Housewives	Incense stick rolling	Bidi rolling	Stitching / embroidery	traders	Casual lab.	Others	<b>Total</b>
No. of Muslim women	13	-	-	01	01	-	01	<b>16</b>
No. of Hindu women	12	-	-	01	-	03	-	<b>16</b>

## **(vi) Workshops with Adolescent Girls, Themes and Methods :**

### **Meeting together :**

Since the objective was to bring the girls of both the communities together the first activity was to organize them in mixed groups and ask two leaders in each group to write names etc. of each girl in the group towards 'registration'. Two leaders were chosen, one each from Hindu and Muslim girls to facilitate their coming together.

### **Girls's Dreams :**

The next step was to provide them with large sheets of drawing paper on which each of them had to draw her 'dream' for the future for self. When drawings were done the leaders had to explain each drawing to the participants. The trainers would discuss these with reference to the actuality they live in, at times encouraging, at times cautioning.

### **Getting together :**

Thereafter the girls were given time to play among themselves with whatever they chose, e.g. balls, rings etc. Later they were divided into two inclusive groups which faced each other in 'Anyakshari' wherein pieces of songs are sung beginning with the last letter of the song sung by the other group. This builds up competition between the groups and at times popular songs are sung by all together. The games were expected to break the ice between the communities.

### **Parental constraints :**

Then the parental constraints on their movements would be spoken of and the participants would be led to recognize the vulnerability of their body. The female body would be explained and the parents' concern about them would be juxtaposed to make the concern of the parents their own. The trainer then would ask them to bring their questions the next day in writing if they did not want to disclose who was asking which question.

### **Daughter-Mother Relationship :**

On day II the trainer would get a large number of questions which would take a long time explaining. The trainer would also find occasions to teach them tricks of self defence if placed in difficult situations.

Then the Daughter-Mother Relationship would be taken up for discussion. Most adolescent girls object to their mothers' 'overprotective' stance and so pick quarrels. This would be elaborated upon.

**Role-plays :**

The groups formed earlier on day I would have been asked to perform a role-play on any one of the following themes : (i) I want to go to a friend but my mother does not permit me as the times are bad, (ii) I want to continue to study but my father does not allow me as he wants me to get married soon as times are bad, (iii) I want to look as beautiful as an actress but I do not have money, (iv) child marriage hinders development of girls. The performances would have references to communal riots and the need for peace and harmony.

**Co-operation :**

Later the groups would be provided with an exercise to communicate the message of mutual co-operation. The trainers while underlining the message, would comment on how each group gradually turned to mutuality.

**Exposure :**

Lastly the participants would be asked to join a day long exposure trip. They would also be asked to come to 'Friendship clubs' to be organized by AWAG to continue bringing them together.

### (vii) Report of an Exclusive Workshop of Muslim women :

In the first workshop held on March 3 and 4, 2003, 30 Muslim women aged between 20 to 45 years participated. 19 of these were illiterate. 11 rolled incense sticks, 7 took orders for stitching, 7 were housewives and the rest were self employed in trading. For detailed profile of participants of the workshop see app. a.

#### **Exercise : 'My needs' ?**

After mutual introductions and introduction of AWAG, the participants were divided into four groups. Each person in each group was asked to draw what she thought was her need.

The groups presented the following :

- I. House, garden, she-goat, tea things, plate, water containers, sewing machines, utensils, cooking LPG cylinder etc.
- II. Handcart, Sewing machine, Utensils, Roti, food items, vegetables, trees, stars, etc.
- III. Water containers, milk pouches, a ten rupees currency note, plate, cooking LPG cylinder, stove, utensils, clothing (See ann 3a, 3b, 3c and 3d).
- IV. Bangles, water containers, a lamp, floral design used in colouring palms (mehendi) clothing, a flag, a clock.

The team leader of AWAG then discussed with them how they came to need such primary facilities so acutely. One of them replied that because their lives were disturbed, these became important. The team then turned the discussion to the political game to concentrate on inessentials like temples and mosques when it could not provide the essentials at reasonable rates. But the people would rather eat less of edible oil which has become so very dear, than suffer at the hands of a riotous mob. Even now, after the riots employment is scarce. We are all the time worried about earning the next day's meal. People suffer while those who incited riots remained unaffected. This led a participant to speak of how she had lost her two sons. While sobbing she narrated that they had gone to inquire of the health of their employer but never returned. Months later their bodies were found from a sewer. Another woman had a similar tale to share but she could hardly speak.

## **Religion and Humanity :**

The team then shifted attention to define 'Religion' since it was in the name of religion that communities were estranged and peace was broken. The participants defined religion as

'Praying as per the system established'

'Fasting as per the custom in Islam'

'Tell the truth'

'Keep one's promise'

'Read Quran, the religious text of Islam'

'Love all. Do not hurt any one'

'Live with others in a friendly way. do not fight'

'Cover body from head to foot'

'Respect your neighbour'

'Good behaviour'

Questions were then asked. 'If somebody does not pray everyday nor read Quran would he be a Muslim' ?

The replies randomly suggested that one should honour one's religion.

The trainer responded that in that particular sense they were not capable of being called good Muslims. The Quran forbids use of tobacco but most of them used it. The Quran recommends that daughters should be treated equally with sons. They knew that they discriminated between the two. We did not obey the Quran but only followed the outward rules. The Muslims are asked not to touch alcohol but they do. We only accepted parts of preaching and consider buildings important. If we did not attach importance to mosques so many riots would not take place.

### **Exercise : Add to the line drawing :**

For the next session the trainer made a line drawing suggestive of a girl's face. Then the participants were asked to complete the drawing. A number of them stood up and added detail after detail. Then they were asked to name her. A Muslim name was chosen full with father's name and family name.

'If your daughter were to put on a bindi (a typical red mark on forehead used by Hindu women) or a Mangalsutra (a necklace of black beads worn by married Hindu women) what would you do ?' was the question raised.

Pat came the reply that such things did not make any difference to being a Muslim or a Hindu. A woman with a bindi did not suffer less or more. If a woman lost her dear ones, the loss was felt similarly irrespective of the religions. Poor women suffered most in riotous situations, their sufferings were similar, be they Hindus or Muslims.

## Day II

Day II began with a prayer sung by all participants together. Then recapitulation of previous day's discussion was called for. The concepts that emerged were :

- (1) The poor suffered more during and after riots.
- (2) Religion teaches us to love other beings.
- (3) Women suffer similarly be they Muslims or Hindus.

### **Exercise : Sending a Message or spreading a rumour ?**

An exercise was then launched. The leader said a sentence confidentially in the ear of the person sitting next to her. Then she was asked to repeat it to her neighbour and so on till the last person said it aloud. This longish sentence was shortened and its meaning was completely lost<sup>1</sup>. The exercise was performed once again with a caution that if one was not sure of the message, clarification, repetition etc. could be asked for. The next time the sentence was again shortened and meant something else<sup>2</sup>.

How was this relevant to the days of riots ? One hears rumours. Even in the small room among 30 persons when one could recheck what one had heard, the sentence changed drastically. Think then of rumours. These are words spoken by strangers. There are no means of checking the truth of the statements flung around as rumours. Rumours add to violence during volatile situations. It is better not to heed them.

It is better not to add to crowds. Children should be stopped from going to see out of curiosity. Police firing takes place when crowds gather. The innocent who had gone out of curiosity on hearing that somebody was killed somewhere, falls to the bullet of the police.

The sentences changed midway while being repeated even though checking was recommended because one always changes the content of what one hears to suit one's own mental preoccupations. The trainer then narrated a story<sup>3</sup> how a person quarrelled in a home because a mediator reported statements wrongly. So during riots when one hears rumours one has to control one's self and not rush to places, nor repeat rumours unwisely.

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<sup>2</sup> The sentence as it was first stated : 'You all came here late, when you go to the cinema hall you go there on time, do not go late'. The sentence repeated by the last person publicly : 'How many times did you go to cinema, how many times returned'.

<sup>3</sup> The story in the next section, p 21.

### **Narration of Experiences of participants :**

Next, the participants were asked to narrate their experiences. First narration was made by the trainer. She spoke of a couple of situations during which she felt terrorised, anguished and angry. She also narrated how she participated in a peace rally a few days later where she met and heard many others say that such killings in the name of religion were wrong. That gave her an assurance that all was not lost in this country.

Five participants narrated their experiences. When any one of them spoke of negative experience only, she was asked to narrate a positive experience as well. Eventually the person did so. 'Humanity was alive, kindness was evident, so we should not lose heart' were the comments shared by the participants.

### **Exercise of leading horses :**

The participants were asked to make pairs. One played the horse led by the partner. The partner playing horse had to keep eyes closed and the other controlled movements of the horse by holding the 'horse' by shoulders. Pressure was to be applied to direct movement of the 'horse'. Later they were asked their experiences. Those who played 'horses' resented closing eyes while walking and resented being led also. Those who played 'drivers' were happy controlling movements of the 'horse'.

The exercise was discussed with reference to the experiences of the riots. Some enjoy 'driving' others but those who are driven do not enjoy being controlled by others. Those who keep their minds closed, get easily driven by others who seek to use them. If we remain unaware or ignorant and keep our minds closed, we would be yielding our rights to guide ourselves to others. Education is important, it opens minds. May be, women who are more than 35 years of age could not get educated. It is now upto them to think of educating their daughters, providing them exposure to prevalent thinking and attitudes of people.

Riots took place only where the poor lived. Poor are also ignorant. They easily get drawn into games which others want to play through them. By using poor against poor, Harijans against Muslims or Muslims against Harijans, the drivers of certain attitudes and thinking, make their own gains.

We should decide not to get excited over small nothings which take us into dangerous situations. Somebody throws a stone and we run to avenge it, not

realising that the stone was thrown to bring them out on the streets. Once a crowd gathers, rumours circulate, violence gets an upper hand and those who had run out of their homes suffer the most.

The participants reflected and responded. Nazarunnissa said, 'My mind was locked. Now the lock has opened. Girls should be educated'. Mehurunissa said 'Let us open our minds to education, religion, unity, games played here. Let us not keep our minds closed'. Roshan narrated an incident that had happened within her home indicating how a quarrel caused by misunderstanding was resolved. Jamila responded, 'It is not good to continue in darkness. We must be exposed to the world and see light'. Kulsum added, 'We need to learn a lot'.

### **(viii) Report of an exclusive workshop of Hindu Women :**

The workshop was held on March 6 and 7, 2003. 52 Hindu women aged between 20 and 45 years participated. 14 of these were illiterate. 15 rolled 'bidis' (Indian version of cigarettes), 9 rolled incense sticks, 8 took stitching or embroidery orders, 14 were housewives, the rest were employed as casual labourers.

After the opening song of AWAG, mutual introductions and introduction of AWAG, the workshop was launched with an exercise.

#### **Exercise : 'My Needs' :**

The participants were distributed into four groups. Each person in each group was asked to draw what she thought was her need,. Each group shared a large paper wherein each person got her space.

#### **The following was presented :**

- I. Peacock-the national bird, house, cooking LPG cylinder, sewing machine, tea things, food items, water containers, Rangoli design (design to decorate entrance of a home) a pair of scissors (to cut leaves in which bidis are rolled) and bricks indicating labour.
- II. Cooking LPG cylinder, household items needed in the mornings, Rangoli design, books for children, national flag.
- III. Morning tea-things, stove, house, Sewing Machine, Television set (for entertainment), LPG cylinder, water containers, a pair of scissors and food items.
- IV. House, tree, cooking LPG cylinder, sewing machine, hand cart with vegetables, water container, national Flags, Utensils, Rangoli designs (see ann. 4a, 4b, 4c and 4d).

Majority of drawings were of daily needs of families and also of items related to their employment. Each group had drawn LPG cylinder and Rangoli designs. Rangoli is decorative design of coloured powders on floor in front of the main door of a house. A question was raised by the trainers, what is first, cleanliness or Rangoli ? Does the government provide primary facilities, keeping roads clean ? Or is not the LPG becoming more and more expensive ? Everyday hardships seem to be increasing as prices rise. The trainer asked whether they were comfortable with the situation. The answer was no. Before your discomfort against the government could be expressed, the government turned your attention to religious hatred. Those who never got together to protest against rising prices, came out in large numbers and got together when stones were thrown, houses were burned and people were killed.

The participants said that they had not realised that they could protest against rising prices though they were always cursing price rise. They said that their debts had increased as they could not get employment during those days of riots.

One participant responded by saying that in those days their minds were full of hatred and could think of nothing else. Another said that they were led by others.

### **Religion and Humanity :**

#### **Exercise : Add to the Line drawing :**

Line drawings were made by the trainer. One indicated a man, the other a woman. The participants were asked to put in details. The male was provided with trousers, shirt, beard (goatee) moustache, shoes, eyes, nose and ears. For the female blouse, sari, eyes, lips, nose, ears, with earrings, bangles and bindi in the forehead were added. another female was drawn by a participant who gave her a salwaar kurta dress, a wristwatch and a bangle and no bindi. The two were named. One was given a Hindu name Mina, the other a Muslim name, Salma.

The participants were asked to state differences between the two. Can bindi be the distinctive factor ? The answer was no. It was pointed out that Hindu widows did not use bindi. The next question was : 'How did they differ ?' The answer received included, clothing, customs, celebrations of festivals etc. How did festivals differ ? The answer was that the festivals were related to religion. Then they were asked to describe what they meant by religion. the answers were : light diyas, offer prayer as a ritual, celebrate festival, listen to a kathakar etc.

A question was put across : How is a girl of five introduced to religious practice ?

Pat came the reply : 'She keeps a vow and learns to fast'

The participants described that in case the woman is a Salma, she would perform Namaz, observe fasts called Rojas, read Quaran and join in festivals of Ramzan Id and Mohurram.

Mina is not doing anything that was described above. Did she continue to be a Hindu?

The answer was that she did not discontinue being a Hindu. Then, is there any other way one can understand religion.

The participants listed characteristics of a religious person, humility, service of others, kindness, good behaviour, love, tolerance, not to indulge in hate etc. The trainer elaborated upon this. Both religions support these characteristics and lead people to respect humanity and to co-exist in an atmosphere of love and

acceptance. Religion means being united. A rhetorical question was uttered : what did Christ say when he was crucified. Kamalaben, a participant, replied, 'Oh, God, they do not know what they are doing, so forgive them'. Hate can never end hate, only love can.

The trainer then asked if there was any other way in which Mina and Salma could be compared. How would they feel ? Some said, 'Differently' some said 'Similarly'.

The trainer asked, 'If they were slapped who would be hurt more ?'

All responded : 'Both will feel equally hurt'.

Next question, 'If their husbands turn them out of home how would they feel ?'

Again the answer was unanimous. Both would be equally pained.

Within all were one, only outwardly, they were different.

So, during riots, who suffered more ?

The group responded by saying, 'Women on both sides suffered more'.

'When the riots were raging what were we thinking, how did we feel ?' was the question put across.

The women averred that revenge was uppermost in their minds.

Who did they think turn their minds to revenge ? Politicians ? Leaders?

They answered : 'That was the atmosphere. At such times all talk loudly and we learn'.

"Do we need to change that ? Can we think on our own ?"

One of them said, 'A neighbour widowed during riots. Now she has to suffer. Women suffer the most'.

The trainer asked them to think over this situation. Once, walking on a road, you hit a large stone and damage your toes. Next time you traverse the road you will be careful about the stone. if not, you would be a fool in your own estimation. Do we want to act foolishly or not had to be decided by us.

Participants answered severally : 'We will have to decide how we want to walk'. 'I have to differentiate between good and bad, right and wrong'.

The trainer ended the day by reminding them that they were all connected with one another in many ways so start thinking about it all.

## Day - II

The day began with recapitulation of the previous day's discussion. they underlined three concepts.

- (1) The poor suffered more during and after riots
- (2) Religion does not teach hate. Communities of human beings need not fight.
- (3) Women must befriend women because women suffer more.

One of the participants was noticed as sitting in a corner, covering her body fully especially her head as she had no hair. The trainer asked to bring her out of the cocoon she was building around herself, and asked : 'What did you draw yesterday ? She had to be coaxed to reply, finally she said that she had drawn a national flag. The trainer inquired why she had drawn national flag. Again after much cajoling she said that Mahatma Gandhi wanted it. The trainer said that her connecting the Mahatma with the flag was not clear, so would she clarify. The answer was, 'The Mahatma died asking for peace between communities needed in our country. He brought the flag'. Here was a participant who in her own way connected Gandhian concept as well as the freedom struggle with the recent riots and expressed it through her choice of a symbol in her drawing.

### **Exercise : Sending a message or spreading a rumour ?**

An exercise was launched. The leader whispered a sentence in the ear of the next participant. She was asked to whisper the same in the ear of the participant next to her, so on to the last person who would say it loudly to the group. The initially stated sentence was long and different. The last version was shorter and different. The participants were then asked to get the message more clearly by asking questions, getting it repeated etc. before transmitting the same further on. The next round also yielded a shorter sentence<sup>1</sup>.

'The sentence changes among such a small number within four walls even when one could check and recheck. What could happen when some news is conveyed from mouth to mouth in various areas of this city ? Do you know if such things happen ?'

Pat came the reply, 'Yes, during riots'.

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1. The sentence in the first round was : 'You will think over all that we discussed in these two days and act upon it'. The final version was : Pay heed to what was said.

The sentence in the second round was : 'Meetings are scheduled on 10th and 11th so come at 12 to the meetings'. The final outcome was : 'Meetings is on 10th'.

'News about a stone throwing incident could be stretched to include a murder. On hearing that how would one respond ?'

'We would get angry and say if ten on our side are killed, we ought to kill 20 of the other side'.

We need to realise that rumours cannot be true. So we must think about the possibilities and keep calm.

A story was introduced at this juncture. A Daughter in-law sent a message through the servant that lunch was ready. The mother-in-law asked that a message be conveyed that she was not well so needed a cup of coffee. The servant went back to say that mother did not want lunch because she did not cook well. The daughter-in-law was upset and angry, the mother-in-law awaited her cup of coffee. One can imagine the trouble that must follow. Such things happen within a family, these could happen among neighbours and also within communities. So it is always better to check the messages / rumours that one hears and not act in a hurry.

### **Narration of Experiences of Participants :**

The participants narrated positive experiences.

Shardaben recalled that at the time of the earthquake in 2001 neighbouring Muslims had helped them a lot. Kamlaben had gone to her brother-in-law to invite him away from the area where he was living. when she was there she was much worried but the Muslim women there had allayed her fears. Hansa said that at the time of riots she was sheltering in AWAG's short stay home. It appeared to be unsafe for her to continue there so AWAG's Muslim friends gave her a pair of clothing in which she was dressed as a Muslim. Then she was escorted to her relative's home. Hiraben said that she had to take shelter at an unknown place when she was returning to Bapunagar. Not a single autorickshaw driver was prepared to go with her and her companions so they had to walk all the distance. The man who had provided them temporary shelter was very nice to them. Shantaben said that during riots her relative had looked after a Muslim boy who was their son's friend. Both sides had acted with compassion and their humanity was in evidence.

### **Exercise of leading Horses :**

Five pairs were asked to volunteer for the exercise. The partner playing the horse had eyes closed and covered while the other controlled the movements of the 'horse' by holding the 'horse' by shoulders. Pressure had to be applied to the shoulders to control the movement of the horse. The participants were asked their experiences. The 'horses' resented being 'blinded' and that made them feel unsafe. They did not

like being controlled by others. Those who controlled, enjoyed themselves but were resentful that the horses did not properly obey them. The onlookers said that they would prefer controlling to being controlled.

This discussion then was led to connect the exercise to the situation during riots. The ignorant are 'blinded' through misinformation, and propaganda of various kinds. Those who lead, reap benefits. The participants responded by saying that those who made others fight were safely sitting under fans in their houses or offices. Kamlaben added, 'No one should fight in the name of religion. We need to keep our minds open, our eyes open and think of ourselves because during riots we, the poor and the women suffer the most'. Dahiben said, 'we were being led by others. Really, we were 'blinded'. We ought not to be led away'.

### **(ix) Report on Workshop III, inclusive of both Muslim and Hindu Women:**

The third inclusive workshop of both Hindus and Muslims was held on 10th and 11th March, 2003.

This workshop was to bring together the Muslim and Hindu women who were separately addressed earlier. All the 30 Muslim women who had attended earlier workshop were asked to join because all do not respond to such calls. 15 of them reported in this workshop. Since Hindu women generally respond fully, 20 women were asked from those who had participated in the earlier workshop. 18 came to the workshop two were held up on account of their social engagements.

Of these 33 women, all except one were married and one was widowed. Their age group was of 21 to 45 years. 13 were illiterate. 10 were occupied in rolling incense sticks, 10 in stitching and embroidery, 3 in rolling bidi and 10 were only housewives.

The participants introduced themselves and so did AWAG persons.

The workshop began with a 'prayer', itni shakti hamen dena Data . . . ' in which all joined.

The participants sat in groups as they came in though they were sitting on the floor in a circle as was the custom, groups of Muslim and Hindu women were together. To make them mingle without making it very obvious, numbered pieces of paper were offered to them. Each participant picked one. The trainer called out numbers, no. 1 had to sit next to no 2 and then no. 3 and so on. This distributed them. At times Hindus were together, at some Muslims but by and large the groups had broken. As the responses were slow and they were nudging one another and showing places, there was relaxation and therefore, acceptance of the sitting arrangement.

As an introductory remark the trainer explained the name of the organisation that it means raising the voices of women, women suffer the most during conflict situations so they have to raise their voices.

The participants recapitulated the exercises they had gone through and also asserted that human behaviour is expected in all religions. To summarise Sultanabonu's words are quite apt. She said 'Why should we fight. Leaders want us to but we should not. Blood in the veins of human beings is of one quality. Biryani and Kheer are named differently but rice is the same. These are named differently'.

## **Exercise : 'My Needs'**

The exercise which was used in the earlier workshops was used again.

The first exercise was launched. They were distributed into four groups. Each group was given a large drawing paper and colours. Each participant was asked to draw. Time given was 15 minutes. In each of the four groups some were Hindu and some were Muslim. Each of them enthusiastically drew and while drawing they were busy talking.

The groups were mixed, women who had probably seen one another living in the neighbourhood but not spoken to. They discussed their drawings and helped one another.

The group leaders presented the following through their drawings : Drawings had writing attached to them

- I      House : 'We will live together, Hindu Muslim are one',  
          Hearts : 'We are one in heart'  
          Cot     : 'We will sit together and speak of our pleasure and pain'  
          Flower: 'We will love one another',  
          Food items, handcart of panipuri.
- II     'We are all one,'  
          A temple and a mosque,  
          A Hindu and a Muslim woman,  
          National Flag, food items, Rangoli
- III    National Flag  
          Two women, Hindu and Muslim, 'We all are one'  
          'Allah and Iswar are one'  
          'Hindu - Muslim are one'  
          'Mera Bharat Mahan'
- IV    A temple and a Mosque, 'We all are one'  
          'Forget revenge and hatred'  
          'Gita, Quran, Bible are one', Swastik, TV, Rangoli  
          'All feel similar pain'. (see ann. 5a, 5b, 5c and 5d).

As soon as one looks at the drawings, unity between the communities becomes obvious. When the groups had made drawings earlier those centred around primary needs of food, clothing and shelter.

The trainer dwelt a little more on these images of primary needs. Why were they short of these things ? Replies were that during riots losses were heavy and work was scarce so replenishment was difficult. Only if the riots had not happened both Hindus and Muslims would have been relaxed. Now both were worried because they were poor. Rich were not worried. They had suffered similarly because they were poor.

In this workshop they also came up with images and words suggestive of unity.

In separate workshops they had expressed themselves focussing only on their own neighbourhood, now they had looked beyond. Thrown into each other's company Hindu and Muslim women realized the need for unity much more strongly which got expressed in images of temples and mosques placed adjacent to each other or of Geeta and Quran placed together.

They wrote their comments also like : 'We are all one'.

One of the participants, Shardaben said this. 'When I proposed that I had to go to a meeting, my mother-in-law disapproved of my coming in this area. I requested her to go with me and see for herself if this was the right place to go or not. She came with me and having seen the office and all she approved of it, though she had believed that Hindu women ought not to cross the 'border' to go to areas dominated by Muslims.

### **Exercise : Tug of War :**

Twelve women on each side, nine observers. It so happened that on one side there were all Muslim women and all Hindu women were on the other side. Muslim women pulled with force while Hindu women were yet laughing among themselves. Suddenly somebody commented : 'Pakistan won'. Husena said, 'We live in Hindustan. Why talk of 'Pakistan'. There are many others who would make us fight but we do not want to'.

Others agreed.

The trainees decided that in the next workshop they would mix the groups on two sides so that Hindus vs. Muslims did not happen. However, they were relaxed on account of the response of Husena.

After a short break the participants reassembled.

## **Mother - Daughter Relationship :**

As they came in the participants noticed a utensil which was covered. As they passed by it, most of them bent down, opened, looked in it, put the cover in place and sat in the circle.

Lalita asked, 'Why was the utensil there ?'

Samim said, 'It should not be here. Somebody forgot it or what ?'

The trainer asked, 'Would you have looked at it if it were open ?'

The answer was 'no'.

Curiosity rules our approaches. This is normal and human. When are we most curious in our lives ? During childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle age, old age, ?

Most answers referred to adolescence. The time when there are changes in the body and the mind notices them. Questions begin then,. Should mothers satisfy that curiosity ?

If they do not, wouldn't the daughters find answers ?

The participants were confused. To speak of sex is tabooed and speaking to daughters was not done at all. What was being suggested by the trainers ? They were worried but did not know answers.

Send daughters to our meetings, the trainers said. Participants agreed.

## **Day II**

As the participants gathered and were asked to sit in the same way as the previous day. The day began with the same prayer, 'Itni shakti hamen dena Data . . .'

During recapitulation session the participants remembered a number of points discussed not only on the previous day but in earlier workshops also. As one spoke of one thing another joined as it were to corroborate her statement or to add to it. Egged on by that kick to memory some started talking among themselves for sometime and then raised voices to share the same. Hindus joined Muslims and vice versa, it was a group of women conversing as a large group. This was encouraged because the objective of the workshop was to promote comradeship among them and what could be better than exchange of experiences ! This camaraderie continued long and appeared to be fruitful.

Shardaben added that her mother-in-law, who was against crossing the 'border' the previous day had asked her to hurry up in the morning on that day so that she could reach on time for the workshop.

After a short break another theme was taken up.

### **Bondages of women :**

The trainer introduced the participants to the theme of restrictions under which women live and function. They were shown a visual that showed a woman within webs. Socially, women were much restrained. A couple of restrictions were mentioned by the trainer and the participants listed many more. They spoke about the comments they had heard when stepping out of home to come to attend the workshops organized by AWAG.

The participants connected the issue of woman's bondages with vulnerability of female bodies. They, as mothers, had restrained their daughters from moving freely during riots and were restraining them even then. They also spoke of rumours that terrified them of the 'revenge' that 'the Others' might take by raping their daughters. Many had sent away their daughters to the rural areas to their relatives. They were aware that men raped women of the opposite group to prove their superiority during conflicts.

This discussion did not divide them in opposite camps but made them feel together beaten as women. It brought out such comments repeatedly as, 'we women face many taboos'. Women's problems are many', 'As mothers, our worries never seem to end' etc. Identifying with one another as mothers and women, the participants realized a common bond among them, of womanhood. They had earlier realized that of poverty.

### **Organising Women's Committees :**

The trainers then proceeded to organise a women's committee. They said that a committee was needed to further the goal of spreading the message of communal harmony. They agreed that a committee was necessary but individually they appeared to be hesitating. They had to be cajoled into agreeing to be members. The trainers told them stories of how people commented adversely as soon as one takes a stand in public. But one had to accept such discouraging comments as a part of one's way of life. They were asked if they had not experienced that before. A committee was formed of 20 women, 10 Hindu and 10 Muslim.

The participants were told that the field workers would go to their area and take the help of the members of the committee in organising meetings with residents of their locality. Since they all lived in the neighbourhood they were also requested to assist in organising such meetings to spread the message of communal harmony. Moreover, they were also asked to attend meetings organized by AWAG to continue the inter-community dialogue.

**Responses :**

Before leaving they were asked to give their responses with reference to the workshops and their experiences therein.

Salma : 'We are all human beings, we should come together'.

Dahiben : 'We came to know so much. I learned how to look after my daughter better'.

Lalitaben : 'Women face many problems. We must help one another'.

Jayedabibi: 'We never allowed daughters to go out. But we will send them here'.

Shardaben: 'We were very wrong. We were led away by others and did not stop to think we should not have allowed ourselves to be led like that'.

### **(x) Report on a workshops with Adolescent Girls :**

The first of the ten workshops planned for adolescent girls was held on 5th May 2003, 35 girls participated of whom 33 were Muslim and 2 were Hindus 9 girls were attending school while the others had dropped out. Among school going girls 7 were Muslim. For detailed profile of the participants in Adolescent Girls' workshops please, see, ann. b.

#### **Meeting together**

After a prayer was sung by all together, the participants were divided into four groups. From each group two leaders, one Muslim and one Hindu were identified. They were given the task of 'registering' the names, age and such other details of the girls in their groups.

This exercise made them know one another well enough. When the leaders had completed registration they introduced their members to the large group.

#### **Drawing the Dreams :**

The leaders were then given drawing papers and colour. Each participant was asked to draw what was her dream about self. Some indicated that they wanted to be a teacher, a nurse, a doctor, or wanted to run a beauty parlour. Some indicated that they wanted to have a home of their own. Some even drew flowers and trees near homes. The girls then explained their dreams. They were shifting homes all the time and so they hankered after a permanent and large home with flowers and trees around. The girls were then asked what they were doing or proposed to do to realise their dreams. Some agreed that they would have to study hard, some others agreed that the size of the house did not matter much, what mattered was the peace and harmony among the inmates and in the outer environment.

After the session the participants were asked to spend some time playing. As they grouped themselves to play, inhabitants of nearby *chalis* came together, their religion did not divide them, those who had known one another as neighbours drew nearer. Thereafter they were organised into two large groups to play 'Autyakshari'. As their inhibitions dropped the girls joined in and sang lustily joining anyone who began singing the lines, quickness in finding the line to sing was all important. A popular song was sung by both sides, thus binding all together.

#### **Parental Constraints :**

After a break the theme of parental constraints was introduced. Why were they not allowed to go out of homes as they wanted to was the question that was sought to be answered. The vulnerability of the female body was explained in great detail. Sex education was imparted. The participants were deeply interested but did not want to show that as the subject is socially tabooed. They were then told that the next day they could bring questions in writing so that the identity of the questioner would not be revealed but answers would be found.

The next day i.e. on Day II a number of questions were asked. These were brought on pieces of paper. Elaborate answers were given, at times repeating details given

on the previous day to provide more clarification. The trainer also took time to explain how to defend one's self if pushed in difficult situations. The trainer asked them whether they would reconsider their resentment of their mothers' overprotective concern.

### **Daughter-Mother Relationship :**

As trainers had spoken to mothers of their relationship with their daughters, so they spoke of the relationship of daughters with their mothers. they were asked to take care of their own body and not consider their mother as their enemy. The mothers were following the social taboo but they were worried about growing daughters' sexuality. Henceforth it was their own responsibility to be concerned about self. Perhaps they would be able to review their relationship with their mothers.

### **Role-plays :**

On the previous day the four groups were asked to perform a role-play each on any one of the following themes. (1) I want to go to a friend but my mother does not permit me as the times are bad, (2) I want to continue to study but my father does not allow me as he wants me to get married soon as times are bad. (3) I want to look as beautiful as an actress but I do not have money, (4) Child marriage hinders development of girls. Each group performed and there were references to communal riots, tensions within communities and more restrictions on the movements of adolescent girls. Each performance was critically examined by the other three groups and trainers when all the four were done. The girls were naturally critical of the restrictions put on them by the parents. The aspirations to be beautiful were approved of by many among the participants but the approval was not articulated. The trainers drew attention to the underlining current of communal tensions which made the elders more concerned about their daughters. They appreciated the girls' wishes to continue their study. Friendships were also put under strain in trying times like communal riots but we must continue dialogues.

### **Co-operation :**

Later the groups were put through an exercise. Four puzzle-boxes were given to them. One piece from each box was replaced by another piece from another box thus making each box deficient in one piece. When the groups fixed the puzzle, they could not fix the odd piece in. So some reached, some waited, some sat around carelessly. Finally when all the four puzzles were fixed the trainers discussed the moves made by the participants which made it clear that co-operation and mutuality were important in resolving problems faced by many of us.

### **Exposure and Friendship Clubs :**

Then it was time to announce the exposure trip the next day, the destination, the time and place of departure etc. They were also asked to join 'friendship clubs' to be organized by AWAG when they would be able to learn some skills if they wished to and to keep up their friendships with AWAG as well as with one another.

### (xi) Variations in the Schedules :

Such units of 3 workshops were repeated in five different areas. The trainers had to make changes in the schedule as per requirement. At times, the trainers had decided to make changes, at times, the environment compelled them to bring in change. A few of these practiced during the next four groups of workshops are listed below.

(i) The tug of war

It was decided to be careful about the composition of two groups. These had to be mixed groups. After having exerted utmost one group was happy that it had won but both were complaining that their palms were bruised and feet burned with the heat. The trainers asked them why they had gone in the hot sun to play. Prompt reply was, 'you asked us to'. The trainers pointed out that such non-questioning compliance was the problem. They were being led by others and they followed without waiting to think whether it was worth following or not. The participants agreed that such was the case with most of them.

(ii) The tug-of-war was not possible at the workshop held in Raikhad. The hall acquired for the purpose did not allow large space. So another exercise was used. The trainer announced, 'In today's newspapers there was an announcement that a star was going to be seen in the sky at 1.35 p.m. So let us rush out and see the star, it is such a rare phenomenon !' Saying this, the trainer started walking towards the door and went out. The participants followed. On returning they fretted and fumed why they were taken out in the heat ! The trainer pointed out that it was up to them to decide if stars could be seen in day light. They did not question and followed without thinking.

(iii) One group assembled very late. They were late by more than an hour. This irked the trainers. So they put the participants through an exercise about 'Unequal Resource Distribution'. The exercise showed that like money and means, time was an important resource. The message hit the participants so well that thereafter the group was never late !

(iv) Once the exercise related to rumours was missed out from the first two separate workshops. So it was taken up in the third workshop. Similarly, exercise of leading horses was missed out. It was taken up later.

The schedule was framed to achieve specific objectives. So what was considered important was that the women belonging to two communities came closer, that they viewed riots as avoidable conflicts and that as human beings they could live with each other and as women they could relate to each other. As long as this was achieved, the schedule was treated as flexible. Changes depended on the training teams' collective understanding of the participants' reactions to exercises and discussions generated during the workshop.

## **(xii) Evaluation of the participants' Responses :**

The trainers' assessment during the trainings was that the participants were largely attentive. Expressing their agreement by nodding or disagreement by quickly interjecting a loud 'no' was common. The groups made effort to follow the outcome of exercises, discussions, the inbuilt arguments etc. to gauge what was being asserted by the trainers. When more articulate ones expressed their assent or dissent others listened with care. Some joined in the discussions later.

The responses of the participants in exclusive workshops of Hindus or Muslims were emotional. Muslim women used to burst into tears while speaking of their needs or narrating their experiences. Hindu women used to shriek angrily that they had lost relatives and employment for long periods of time.

It was different in inclusive workshops which were held after the first two exclusive ones had taken place. The participants' responses were no longer emotional but were quite different. It appeared that during and after the previous workshops they had thought things over and so what they stated in the mixed inclusive workshop was the result of deliberations within. For example, during the first group of making drawings of one's needs (which was common in both exclusive and inclusive workshops) Kulsumbibbi said that nothing like tea, food for house was useful till peace prevailed.

The participants agreed with the trainers that in future they would not be led by rumours, that they would take care that neither they nor their children would go to crowd at places during riots. More importantly, they said that they were clear about distinction between religion and rituals and that human approach was much more valuable. They said that they usually participated in festivals of both communities which they would continue to do. Their words no longer spoke of hate but expressed acceptance, fear was alleviated. When the announcement of forming a committee was made, it was accepted because they felt that in order to be active on the issue, they had to be a part of an organisation.

### (xiii) Conclusion :

AWAG team reached the following conclusions :

- 1) Both Hindu and Muslim women's groups had started in the direction of social reconciliation.
- 2) The fear of 'the Other' had thawed and distrust had given way to trust.
- 3) The 'border' created after the riots was being erased from their minds. Both groups were prepared to share food and tea together. Both expressed desire to join in celebrations of each other's festivals.
- 4) We were confirmed in our thinking that before organising such workshops jointly, we must speak to them separately as groups. Having observed their behaviour and gauged their mental make up, we realised that had we asked the two groups together to begin with, that could have been disastrous. Perhaps the Muslim group would have receded and the Hindu group would have paid lip service. If we had done that we could not have had expressions such as 'We were led by others and we followed. We should not have done that'. Or we could not have been witness to Hindu women going to tea at a Muslim woman's house.
- 5) The time frame decided upon for the workshop turned out to be necessary and useful. Four hours a day for two days appeared to be the minimum necessary span needed to communicate, to think over, to debate and to confirm mental processes, a few hours in a single day will not be enough. Even eight hours in a single day will not be enough because that would not provide for the participants' time of checking up the freshly heard concepts with family members or neighbours. Every individual has one's own logic and way of thinking or arriving at a decision. This needs time to reflect, to check, to consider and so on to the final decision.
- 6) Exercises proved to be useful in making them all participate. Getting their experiences and building arguments on their narrations kept up their interest in the process. Both the exercises and encouragement provided to the participants made the workshops highly interactive.

- 7) Each workshop has its own special identity. Each group responds differently. The trainer has to be sensitive and when necessary should make changes in the schedule. The intention always is to communicate the message as per the objective and not only to `stick to schedules. The trainer has to be wary about not alienating the group so that it is silenced. Submission is not the goal, live debate is welcome, that only can open minds.
- 8) When Muslim women narrated their experiences of riots that was lined with tears. Hindu women spoke at times with anger but did not speak language of hate or revenge. Hindu women maintained that Muslims ate chicken and mutton so they were cruel. Muslims therefore were more prone to be angry and blood-thirsty. However in a workshop a Hindu woman who lived amidst Muslims praised them for the support they provided to her family. Another Hindu woman shrilly opposed her as her brother was severely hurt by a hand-grenade landing near him.
- 9) Muslim women ordinarily covered themselves in a 'burqua'. Older women kept them on even when they were seated inside a room. Younger women removed them soon and felt relieved. Older women said that they were used to covering themselves fully. In inclusive workshops Hindu and Muslim women mixed well with one another. They sat alternately and did not resist such sitting arrangement. In one workshop of Hindu women we had heard them saying that they did not like Muslims as they ate non-veg food. Thereafter in a mixed workshop, these women were noticed going for a cup of tea to the house of a Muslim woman during the interval in the workshop on Day II ! The trainer wondered whether what they stated was what they had heard from others while they themselves were happy to be friends with Muslim women.
- 10) Hindu women were as fearful as Muslim women. A young woman narrated how her mother-in-law asked her not to cross 'the border' and go into Muslim locality. Then she requested the older woman to go with her and see for herself. The mother-in-law sat in the workshop for sometime and left. Next day when it was time for the younger woman's workshop, she reminded the daughter-in-law and asked her to hurry ! The workshop helped allay fear of 'the Other' and of crossing the 'border'.

Among the Hindu women's group a participant had said nothing during day I. The trainer asked her next day what was her drawing. Answer did not come easily, she had to be cajoled, then she said that she had drawn the national flag. 'Why national flag ?' the question was to fathom the depths of the mind of this reticent person. After some persuasion, she said that she drew the flag because she remembered Gandhiji. The trainer wondered, Why 'Gandhiji ?' Pat came the reply, 'He never wanted fights like this'. From drawing to person, from person to his concept was the movement for the trainer, reverse was it for the person who made the drawing. It was her method of expressing desire for peace. To her it was a necessity.

11. Through the workshops 427 adolescent girls of 12 to 19 age group were addressed of whom 183 were Hindus and 244 were Muslims. Only 3 girls had never gone to school. While more than 286 girls reported having studied through high school and a couple were studying in colleges, 65% of them had dropped out from studies during the riots of the 35% (149) studying, 33% (49) were also working.

The reasons stated by the girls for not studying at that time were related to riots like parents were lost or father went to jail or mother had to work so she had to take care of siblings or was sent away to a village where there was no school or father did not send her to school.

The girls were largely dreaming of comfortable homes and wanted to learn skills to earn. Some also felt the need to study more. As young persons, they were full of joy and enthusiasm and were sore about the elders in the family who restricted their movements. They learned all about female body and sex very attentively and felt that the concern of their elders was their own concern thereafter. They had never spoken of their dreams to others nor was the elders' strictness ever explained to them. Therefore they felt happy as a group and became more open and friendly.

During the four days that they were brought together the girls made friends, so on the third day they were asking why a particular person had not yet appeared. During the exposure trip they were noticed exchanging addresses and phone numbers. So when they came to friendship clubs organised by AWAG they had become friends.

#### 4. Reflections of AWAG :

The handling of the workshops to establish dialogue between Hindu Harijan and Muslim women proved to be quite challenging. From the first visits of enrolling participants to the last step of organizing committees of participants, the training team remained tense wondering all the time about responses they would receive. At the back of the mind were experiences when AWAG's team was not acceptable to the community and the team had to withdraw. Even when participants arrived there was the anxiety, whether the responses would be positive.

AWAG had planned to work with younger generation also. The participation of the adolescent girls depended upon the approval of these women. If they sent the girls, AWAG could work with them.

AWAG also wanted them to spread the message of communal harmony. It was hoped that the participating women would speak of their experiences in the workshops to a number of other persons thus spreading the messages impacting on the mind set of these individuals. Moreover AWAG was looking forward to their assistance. Meetings were planned in their localities where they were expected to assist in organizing. 'Will they. Will not they ?' were the questions continuously bothering the training team.

As the team got on with the workshops, they became more confident. There was an experience of some women not responding in a workshop. So a few were replaced by others.

The participants sent their daughters with their friends. Those workshops also could be held. Adolescent girls had their moods but then they could be cajoled into participating.

AWAG's team was happy to have been able to establish dialogue among Hindu and Muslim women. AWAG had proposed dialogue, they took a step further. They started visiting one another, a Hindu woman calling at a Muslim neighbour's home and vice versa. AWAG had proposed that they send their daughters, they volunteered to be around to share responsibilities during the girls' exposure trips. AWAG wanted them to assist in organizing meetings in their neighbourhoods, they not only organized the meetings, they eloquently participated in putting across the message of communal harmony.

Questions could be raised about the small number thus accosted or how long would the spirit of friendship between the two communities last or whether women would be able to effectively restrain their men folk from rioting in future and so on.

Assurances in our minds could be stated thus. The women who participated in the workshops had internalized the messages so that they would not only stop to think before hurting others, but they would make others think before blindly following crowds. The participants were made to think and express their opinions through exercises, games, stories etc. The activities they indulged in made them mentally active. It appeared that what they had heard as propaganda was repeated by them once but then they thought it over. For example in an exclusive workshop a participant was saying that Muslims were cruel because they were non-vegetarians. Another participant had soon remarked that they were also non vegetarians so that should apply to them also. In another workshop one of the participants had said that Muslims were dirty and cruel because they were non vegetarians. During the inclusive workshops this person was noticed going with her friends to a Muslim woman's house for a cup of tea.

These participants are being invited to AWAG to share discussions, trainings, meetings etc. They respond in large numbers and participate well. At times one or two of them come visiting, spend some time sitting around and leave. At times some bring along with them women who face problem in their families to the counselling centre of AWAG. These are seen by us as signs of their becoming outgoing, more mobile and caring for themselves as for others. They have stepped out of their small circles into wider spaces and their minds have also opened to other thoughts. We see hope in that.

Initially we had hoped to bring neighbours together. So that they greeted one another with smile and were not fearful of one another. We had hoped that the concept of the border would be erased from their minds. We have now come to believe that their smiles could be replicated on other faces, bonds of friendships could be bound, communal harmony could be revived.

The adolescent girls came to AWAG's workshops at the bidding of the mothers or elders or neighbours. Some groups were escorted by an elderly woman. AWAG appreciated their role and invited them to join in the processes of the workshops. They willingly participated and became valuable facilitators.

The girls displayed many moods, from being playful and aggressive to being serious and responsible. Most groups enjoyed role plays as these reflected their own lives very clearly to them. Discussions after each role play included the aftermath of the recent riots and the need for peace was articulated by the girls. For restrictions on their movements also they blamed the riots. Life had become difficult after those frightening days and they wished such horrors did not take place again. They hoped

their friendships with girls of the other community would last a long time. In the hopes of the girls AWAG team saw the fulfillment of the efforts put in bringing them together. The efforts will be continued to reinforce the lessons that were learned.

As the trainees had spoken to mothers of their relationship with their daughters, so they spoke of the relationship of daughters with their mothers. They were asked to take care of their own body and not consider their mother as the enemy. The mothers were following the social taboo but they were worried about growing daughters' sexuality. Henceforth it was their own responsibility to be concerned about self. Perhaps they would be able to review their relationship with their mothers.

On the previous day the four groups were asked to perform a role play each on any one of the following themes. (i) I want to go to a friend but my mother does not permit me as the times are bad. (2) I want to continue to study but my father does not allow me as he wants me to get married soon as times are bad. (3) I want to look as beautiful as an actress but I do not have money. (4) Child marriage hinders development of girls. Each group performed and there were references to communal riots, tensions within communities and more restrictions on the movements of adolescent girls. Each performance was critically examined by the other three groups and trainers when all the four were done the girls were naturally critical of the restrictions put on them by the parents. The aspirations to be beautiful were approved of by many among the participants but the approval was not articulated. The trainers drew attention to the underlining current of communal tensions which made the elders more concerned about their daughters. They appreciated the girls' wishes to continue their study. Friendships were also put under strain in trying times like communal riots but we must continue dialogues.

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Then it was time to announce the exposure trip the next day, the destination, the time and place of departure etc. They were also asked to join 'friend ship clubs' to be organized by AWAG where they would be able to learn some skills if they wished to and to keep up their friendships with AWAG as well as with one another.

**Schedule of Exclusive Workshops :**

Time	Day I	Day II
12.00 noon to 12.15 p.m.	AWAG's opening song Mutual Introductions AWAG's Introduction	A prayer like song on getting enough strength to live together 'Itni Shakti hamen dena Data . . . ' and quick recapitulation of previous day's work
12.15 p.m. to 1.45 p.m.	Exercise : Drawing 'My Needs' Presentation by the leader of the group of the drawings and discussion with reference to the present situation in the city	Exercise : Whispering a message and carrying it forward followed by a discussion of Rumours and Violence generated or increased through them.
1.45 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.	Recess	Recess
2.00 p.m. to 3.00 p.m.	Defining Religion with the help of the participants	Narration of Experiences of participants during riotous times.
3.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.	Exercise : Providing details in the line drawing of a female followed by a discussion on Religion of Humanity.	Exercise : Leading horses followed by a discussion of choices for future, blind following of others or making informed choices and leading next generation.

**Schedule of Inclusive (Hindu-Muslim mixed) workshops :**

Time	Day I	Day II
12.00 noon to 12.30 p.m.	AWAG's opening song Mutual Introductions Exercise : Pick chits with nos and sit accordingly	Quick Recapitulations and Responses
12.30 p.m. to 1.00 p.m.	Quick Recap and previous workshops	Woman's Bondages
1.00 p.m. to 1.45 p.m.	Group Exercise : 'My Needs' Drawing their needs individually yet in a group, presentation by the leader and discussion	A discussion of bondages being common to both Hindu and Muslim which make them discriminate against their daughters.
1.45 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.	Recess	Recess
2.00 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.	Tug of War and discussion of who leads and how	
2.30 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.	Mother-Daughter relationship	Sharing of experiences during riots
3.30 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.	- do -	Organising women's committee