

Building Bridges?

How do we handle change in our increasingly diverse society? How do people from different ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds understand and communicate with each other? What do we have in common?

Here is a snapshot of one of the larger communities:

The British Asian scene

Prosperity and influence

The British Asian scene has been transformed in the last 10 years. The changes are most obvious in the media, where **Goodness Gracious Me!**, **Bend it like Beckham**, **Bombay Dreams**, **The Kapurs at No 42** - and other productions - have propelled Asians into the mainstream. The craze for all things Asian extends to music (*bhangra!*) and of course food (*Chicken Tikka Masala* for anyone?). Asians are prominent in business, professional life and increasingly in politics.

Alienation and the generation gap

And yet... there is another side. Discrimination is rife. Unemployment is soaring in some communities. Questions about citizenship and identity persist. What does it mean to be 'British'? There are tensions between tradition and change. The alienation between the generations was expressed most starkly in the riots in cities like Oldham and Bradford.

“I’m British but I have no intention of becoming a brown Englishman.”

Diversity and division

There is a strong sense of community and groups. Yet sometimes these are exclusive. It can be difficult to relate to people of a different 'group', especially other faith communities.

September 11 changed a lot for British Asians. Everybody has felt some of the tension. For some young Muslims it meant there was no alternative to radical Islam. For others it opened up old wounds and divisions that had been beneath the surface. Some people didn't want to be called 'Asian' in case they were identified with terrorists or extremists. Other conflicts in the sub-continent have also contributed to keeping barriers up.

Spirituality

There is a resurgence of traditional faiths. Nationalism and intolerance compete with secularism and a genuine desire for inclusiveness. In the pick 'n' mix age many are looking for a synthesis that combines what they see as the best in all faiths, without excluding any.

A new resource for groups

Masala Groups help to build bridges of friendship and understanding by bringing people together across some of the barriers, to discuss matters of common concern.

Masala BridgeBuilders bring spice and taste! They fill a real need, both in the Asian community and also in our society as a whole.

Masala BridgeBuilders flavours include

- Openness to people of all backgrounds and opinions
- Acceptance of others' point of view
- Willingness to listen and learn
- Learning to disagree without being disagreeable!
- A place where deeper issues can be discussed in a non-threatening environment
- Respect for other people, their values and culture

These are good flavours! Our society, with all its divisions and tensions, badly needs them. Unfortunately they often seem to be in short supply.

"As a result of meeting together over a period of time trust has been built, friendships have been made and opportunities to talk about the deeper issues and concerns of life abound."

Masala BridgeBuilders are informal groups that talk about a topic of common concern. They can take place in almost any context, with people of any background. They don't attempt to come to conclusions but simply to provide a space and opportunity for people to share together in a relaxed way.

Anybody can run a Masala BridgeBuilders Group:

It could be an existing group that meets regularly, which can become a Masala Group with the right extra ingredients

(e.g. parent and children, satsang, youth group, theatre group, older men's club...)

or there may be a group that does not necessarily meet on a regular basis but which might be glad to include 'Masala' type discussion

(e.g. community association, parent-teachers meeting, extended family gathering...)

or you can invite people to form a new Masala BridgeBuilders group.

How do Masala BridgeBuilders work?

Masala BridgeBuilders are based on a **topic** - something current or something that has on-going relevance.

The discussion follows this kind of format:

The Masala BridgeBuilders pack contains

- Guidelines for running the group
- Topic(s)
- Readings, quotes, case studies or suggested video clips to introduce the topic
- Questions to open discussion
- Questions to clarify the issues
- Summary

Topics currently available include:

Citizenship and identity

Generation gap

Love and (un)arranged marriage

Race and discrimination

Role Models

Work and unemployment

Religion in our society (in preparation)

Family business (in preparation)

Introduction

Something to spark interest

- Current issue
- Quote
- Role play
- Story
- Case study

Free discussion

Clarify the issues

Summary

It's not necessary to come to a conclusion or to reach agreement. These are usually topics where there are lots of different views! But by talking together people learn others' perspectives. This can lead to better understanding, which can also contribute to mutual respect and trust.

Some groups may also wish to make notes of

Action points & follow up

Masala Bridgebuilders are an ideal resource for groups that need regular topics for discussion

- Schools (citizenship, ethics, RE)
- Youth groups
- English language classes
- Refugee & asylum support groups
- Adult learning groups
- Family learning groups

Starting Masala BridgeBuilders

Clarifying the aim

1. Is there a particular group of people with whom you are relating?

For example

- Parents and children
- Men (from any particular background?)
- Young people
- Senior citizens
- A cultural group (Gujarati business people, sports people, business...)
- A mixed group
- People from a particular location
- Families

2. Are you trying to bring people together for the first time? Or is this an existing group?

3. Do you want to meet for a limited time or do you hope to continue on an open-ended basis?

It is best to start with a specific number of sessions and then review.

The main aim is to have a meaningful, open discussion, reflecting the flavours on page 2 of this booklet. You want a group that builds relationships of trust and friendship, and opens up a place to talk at more than a superficial level.

Looking for existing groups

The best way to start a Masala BridgeBuilders group is to make use of existing groups. See the examples on pages 3 and 4.

If you can, working with these groups is often better than trying to start something completely new.

But of course to do this you need to become part of the community and familiar with the structures and the people yourself. That means spending time sharing common concerns, making friends, building credibility, and taking time for people.

Finding leaders

Groups need leaders – the kind who can encourage and facilitate discussion without dominating. Make sure you have the right leaders. Good resources are available to help give training in leading a group, if necessary.

Developing a team

For effective groups you need more than one person. There are different roles: host/ess; inviting people; leading discussion; encouraging & participating

Some working models

There is no limit to the settings that can become Masala BridgeBuilders. Here are some examples:

Tuesday morning, 10:45 am, at the Mother and Toddler's group.

The children are finding their favourite toys, and coffee and biscuits have just been served. This is the third week they have used the Masala BridgeBuilders material and Meena is having a go at leading. It's her first time to lead and everyone is keen to support her. As soon as the children are settled, the parents move to a corner of the room to start their discussion.

The topic is Love and (un)arranged marriage. Zadia has a lot to say this week as her eldest daughter, Rohana, is 15 and she feels she should be married soon. Jane, who coordinates the group, knows what Zadia must be thinking and is glad the material will help Zadia hear the views of other cultures. But it will also be good for Sheila and Janet to learn about the pressures Zadia faces.

Sunita is pulled away, because young Suresh has become noisy, but the rest of the group carry on. The material is flexible, and people can move in and out. . They enjoy this short period of structured discussion with topics that interest everybody.

Wednesday afternoon at the Asian Cultural Centre,

The men gather for the Masala BridgeBuilder discussion on Generation Gap. Imran, who runs the centre, is keen to see how the group will respond to the material.

Khalid, Rana, Peter and Naveed pass the material between them, and begin to look through it to see what the readings and film clips are.

Imran starts the discussion: *"It's terrible how the children of today behave. No respect for the traditional values of our culture."*

They all have a good laugh as they watch the video clip from *East is East*.

"Now that would never happen in my house..." says Rana. The others in the group keep quiet as they think how they would have handled the situation 'George' was in.

Thursday evening, Point of View

Point of View is a gathering of men from different faith backgrounds. Topics are presented and freely discussed, in an informal setting. The organisers comment: *“As a result of meeting together over a period of time trust has been built, friendships have been made and opportunities to talk about the deeper issues and concerns of life abound.”*

Friday afternoon at the Sixth Form College

After lunch, David goes back to his classroom for the Masala BridgeBuilder group. 8 other members of his Tutor group are there. It has been very interesting to see the similarities in the cultures of Rashid and Alberto, even though their parents are from completely different countries.

Some of the group are already in the classroom, working out which part of the play they would like to read. The group has become closer as the material has helped them share more of their home lives with each other, but also allowed them to explore their parent's perspective on different situations.

Friday evening at the Satsang group

Satsang groups are common in South Asian Hindu or Sikh culture.

Satsang comes from two Sanskrit words *sat* (truth) and *sang* (together). It is literally a ‘gathering around truth’. It refers to a range of small or large group meetings, usually with a religious purpose, which might include discussion (formal or informal), a talk by a speaker or singing. The groups often meet in a home. Some are regular gatherings – weekly or monthly – others may be one-off meetings, perhaps linked to some special occasion.

A satsang group is generally informal and inclusive. If it is held in a home the whole family are likely to be present. People come with their friends and relations.

In Madhu-ben' s home they have used the Masala BridgeBuilder material a couple of times, on Family and Love and (Un)arranged Marriage.

Masala BridgeBuilders and Key Stages 3 and 4 of Citizenship

Masala BridgeBuilders material is more relevant to Key Stages 3 and 4, but some could also be adapted for Key Stages 1 and 2.

Demonstrate understanding of key citizenship concepts:

- **'diversity, identities and communities'**

All the topics can be used to cover these areas, as they provide an insight into the British Asian perspective on various issues, including ***citizenship & identity***, ***(arranged) marriage*** and ***family***.

The material can be used as a **case study** of one community's attitude towards a particular issue (or issues) - in this case the British Asian community. Students can then discuss the material and compare it to their own cultural experience. (Discussion questions are provided and can be adapted).

For example, after looking at the British Asian perspective on ***'love & marriage'***, students can then compare it to the experience of marriage within their own culture, e.g. White British or Afro-Caribbean British. The material can also be used alongside material covering other cultures, and comparisons can be made this way.

'citizenship & identity' is particularly appropriate here, as it looks at the tensions many young people face as they are in between two cultures. Students can be encouraged to share their own feelings and experiences on this.

- **'tolerance, respect and concern for others'**

The aim of Masala BridgeBuilders is to allow students to go beneath the stereotypes and explore the positive and negative aspects of British Asian culture. How can communities learn from and help each other, as well as respecting the customs and traditions of others?

All the topics are useful for this, as they are aimed at promoting understanding (and hopefully tolerance and respect) of others' culture. However, ***'race & discrimination'*** may be particularly relevant:

- * Students can be encouraged to compare their own experiences with what they have read about in the material.

- * They may also want to discuss their pre-conceptions about British Asian culture and what they have learnt. This would obviously have to be done sensitively, especially if there are Asian students in the group.

- * They can discuss the issue of stereotypes and how the media may contribute to reinforcing them.

- **‘investigate topical issues, problems and events, analyse and evaluate a range of sources of information’**

Masala BridgeBuilders provide a range of sources, including newspaper reports, quotes and extracts from contemporary books and plays.

Students can be encouraged to analyse and evaluate the sources provided. Asian students may want to share how much (or little) the sources reflect their own experiences.

- **‘discuss different issues drawing simple conclusions and justify personal views and opinions’**
- **‘through group and class discussion and debate present and develop ideas and views’.**

The material is designed to prompt discussion, with plenty of opportunity to ask questions and draw out the participants’ views

- **‘listen to and consider the views and experiences of others’**
- **‘express views that are not necessarily their own’**

Students will hear and consider others’ views, from the material or from their classmates. The case studies, readings and role plays also allow them to express others’ views. This could be extended through further role plays or writing a fictional diary account, based on what they have learned.

- **‘communicate their findings and experiences and make suggestions for improvements or changes’**

Each topic concludes with time to reflect on changes the participants would like to make, or issues they would like to act on, and an opportunity to share this with the group.

Masala BridgeBuilders and Key Stage 3 of Religious Education

Masala BridgeBuilders are useful for demonstrating how religious beliefs can influence lifestyle and values. They do not focus on any particular religion but look generically at the British Asian population and the tensions many face as they seek to balance traditional religious beliefs with life in an increasingly secular society.

The material is particularly relevant for the subject 'Rites of Passage', as it focuses on topics such as:

The generation gap: This explores the tensions between younger and older generations of Asians and their different perspectives on issues.

Love and (un)arranged marriage: How do young British Asians of 'marriageable age' cope with the pressure of balancing their parents' expectations with their own preferences?

Work and (un)employment: This topic looks at the pressures some young people face of having to find a job that is both fulfilling for them and also 'acceptable' to their parents.

Masala BridgeBuilders can help students achieve the following Key Stage 3 objectives:

- **Respond to various religious perspectives on questions of meaning and purpose and a range of contemporary moral issues by relating these to their own and others' lives.**
- **Evaluate religious and other views** on human identity and experience, on questions of meaning and purpose **on values and commitments, using appropriate evidence and examples.**

Students can explore and discuss how far values and culture are determined by religious belief and how much is based on tradition. From the religions they have studied, including Christianity, students can consider what values are evident within Asian culture, for example respect for elders and the importance of family. They can compare the material with their own experiences and explore what there is in common as well as the differences.

- **Relate religious beliefs, teachings, practices, lifestyles and the forms of religious expression to their historical and cultural contexts**

The material explores how religious belief is expressed by South Asians in Britain in the 21st century.



Ordering Masala BridgeBuilders

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NB: For each pack you purchase, you may make up to *10 copies* of the scripts and novel extracts included in the sections, as they are subject to copyright. If you need more than this amount, you must order another pack. All other material in the packs may be photocopied freely.

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	Quantity	Price
BridgeBuilders Pack - £20 each		
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