



## Dimensions of Communication in Intercultural Marriages among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, India

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**Abstract:** McLuhan's prophesy of global village has become a reality. Media technologies such as the internet, satellites and optical fiber have led to the intensive growth of social interconnections. We can now very well consider the world as a single place. This advancement has also led to rapid increase in cross cultural communication and social connections cutting across geographical boundaries. Communication process has become less complicated and easy in nature enabling people to not only connect to others but also provide scope and prospects for intercultural marriages, which are indeed, an exciting phenomenon in today's world. Since marriage is an important revered social institution in all human society, it is pertinent to examine the impact of this trend in the human integration system and its effect in the inter-cultural marriages from communication perspective. As two different people coming together have to integrate two different set of cultures and values, it can create language, emotional and identity barriers, especially among the smaller tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh, where, maintaining balance between traditional marriage system and the emerging trends of marriages between different communities is culturally and socially difficult and is still a challenging proposition. It is at this backdrop, that this qualitative study examines the challenges and scope of the emerging trends in intercultural marriages between different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh through the prism of communication dynamics. A constructivist approach was adopted to identify various factors and issues related to communication within intercultural married families.

**Key Words:** Communications, Culture, Intercultural Marriage, Intercultural Communication, Cultural Values, Dimension.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

The world is experiencing a wave of human networking as never seen before with the emergence of digital media. The dimensions of distance and time are shrinking fast due to the enormous stride made by the modern mass media and communication technology. This advancement and proliferation of the media cutting all barriers of race and languages is also rapidly increasing cross cultural communication and social connections across geographical boundaries. Further, this development has enabled people to not only communicate but also physically connect to one another in marriages among people of different cultures across the world, which are indeed, an exciting phenomenon.

According to Coleman (1994), interracial marriages have garnered attention periodically since the turn of the century. There is an increase in studies related to mixed marriages and social scientists have developed major interest in the study of the same. Though from time immemorial, men and women of different nationalities, race, and religion have intermarried, the frequency of mixed marriages has often been considered to be the most conclusive and unbiased way of measuring the level in which the minority assimilate in the society. Arunachal Pradesh is a tribal state in India with 26 major tribes and 50 sub tribes of Indo-Mongoloid race having distinct identity of rich culture and customs. These tribes belong to various religious denominations. Some profess Buddhism, while other practice animism. Some of the tribes believe in the supreme power of Donyi (the sun) and Polo (the moon). It is important to note that in recent times many of the tribes in the state are embracing Christianity.

Traditionally, marriages among the communities are culturally embedded. This culture defines the process such as who marries whom and how? There are well laid out practices which are held sacrosanct among the tribal communities. However, in recent times due to modernization and impact of education there are enormous visible changes in the life style of the tribal people in the state. People from the rural areas are migrating to urban city and towns particularly Itanagar, the capital of the state, for better education, business and jobs. This urbanization of people coupled with the advancements of modern communication technology has led to a substantial increase in social interaction and



connectivity amongst the different communities across the state. Intercultural marriages which was once unheard of among the tribal community, is no longer a taboo anymore as people from different tribes are increasingly getting married in the state.

In a similar note Uunk (1996) suggest that processes of modernization make people more likely to have a positive attitude to marry from outside their own group. This phenomenal transition of inter-tribe marriages among the tribal people of the state provides an interesting scope to explore the dynamics of communication among such families.

As Peterson and Green (2009) points out that communication within the family is extremely important because it enables members to express their needs, wants, and concerns to each other. It is often felt that many of the family disputes and differences are resolved through successful communication and dialogue among the members. In intercultural marriages, it is not only union of two individuals with distinct cultures, but it is also the merger of other family members that includes parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and other relatives. In such a situation there is always a room for healthy relationships as well as conflicts and identity crisis. Considering all these arguments, research in this area is unmistakably required and this study has attempted to examine some of the main factors of cultural differences which impact the family communication pattern in an inter-cultural married couple as well as its scope and challenges.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

In order to have a better understanding of communication patterns in intercultural marriages, two theories were examined in the study, namely theory of Acculturation propounded by W.I Thomas and Florian Znaniecki and Marital Communication theory by Mary Anne Fitzpatrick. The Theory of Acculturation explains how changes take place when cultural groups come into contact with other cultural groups. Factors like language proficiency and use, contact with family members, attitudes towards one's own ethnic culture and that of the spouse's, family relationship values and social factors play a significant role in this process which continues as long as there are culturally different groups in contact. However, in a longer-term adaptation setting like that of the marriage it often entails learning each other's languages, sharing each other's food preferences, and adopting forms of dress and social interactions that are characteristic of each group. Sometimes these mutual adaptations take place rather easily, but they can also create cultural conflicts and acculturative stress during intercultural interactions. According to the theory of Marital Communication, the three factors that predict the dimensions of marriages are - ideology, conflict and interdependence. However, the theory explains that marriage cannot be called a good or bad on the basis of these dimensions. In other words, the best for any couple varies from what they aspire and need in their relationship. In a family system, it is often observed that the role of couple keeps on changing as their companionship matures. A single couple might start as a traditional type and over the period of the time change into a conventional type of couple. The interpersonal communication during these phases may all change. In this study, these two theories are adopted to understand the factors that impact intercultural marriage communication pattern.

## **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The study aimed to evaluate the factors impacting the communication process in intercultural marriage.

## **4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:**

A qualitative approach was undertaken to carry out the research in the capital city of Arunachal Pradesh; Itanagar. The Capital Region is predominantly rural, in terms of area coverage, though majority of the residents can be categorized as urban residents (being habitants of census towns). According to the Census data of 2011, the population of Itanagar was 59,490. The area of the study was selected especially due to its multi-ethnic and non-uniform distribution of population of all classes throughout the locations. By means of purposive sampling, 20 intercultural married couples who were mainly habitants of Itanagar-Naharlagun were chosen to participate in the study. As the study was qualitative in nature, the inductive method of eliciting response from the participants was adopted. Hence, the data was collected by means of in-depth interviews with the help of an interview schedule.

## **5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS:**

Communication has a vital role to play in human existence and marriage is no exception. Effective communication is multifaceted and it requires time and experience to develop. In the study conducted, spouses agreed to the fact that their communication with one another had altered over the years based on their acquired knowledge about themselves as well as their spouse. The study revealed that having an understanding of the various dynamics of communication and understanding of one another is crucial to intercultural marriages. All relationships are essentially complex. However, it was found that the dimensions of differences are more magnified in the case of intercultural



married couples and families because they combine two distinct cultures. The study indicated that resolution to any intercultural problems can be attained regardless of diversity of values, norms, goals, and communication styles.

### 5.1. Communication competence:

Results from the interview shed light on diverse variables, which impact communication pattern in intercultural marriage. Communication competence was one of the factors, which greatly influenced the intimacy and communication dialogue between the intercultural married couples. Chen (1989), in his study proposed four areas for effectiveness and appropriateness in communication such as personal attributes, communication skills, psychological adjustment, and cultural awareness. He explained how all of these four elements played a major role in intercultural relationships and how the presence or lack of these dynamics influences intercultural communication competence.

Similarly, in this study some of these elements were found to be contributing factors in the couple's relationship and their communication competency as an individual. It was observed that those who have had prior exposure to other cultures in their environment at home, school, or neighborhood helped them develop communication competence which fostered their marital satisfaction. Whereas, the study also showed that couples who lacked intercultural exposure tend to have problems within the marriage. The study uncovered an understanding about how intercultural couples created a new culture of openness and acceptance to different cultures. This new culture provided them opportunities to construct a unique culture through a combination of the qualities of different cultures.

### 5.2. Language:

One of the foremost aspects of this study was to know the common language used by the couples to communicate to one another since they come from two distinct language backgrounds. It was found that seven (7) out of the 20 couples used Hindi as a common language for communication between them. Hindi is a widely used language by people in Arunachal Pradesh. This reflects the common practices in the state which comprises of many tribes and sub tribes each having their own oral dialect and Hindi is used as their common language.

According to Gordon (1964b), in intercultural marriage, the member of the minority group loses their distinctiveness, such as their ethnic and religious identities, and assimilates into the majority culture of the dominant group. However, Cohen (1988) argued that intercultural marriage is a sign of acculturation into the dominant host culture, an inevitable consequence of pluralism and social tolerance, which does not necessarily lead to assimilation and to the loss of religious and ethnic identity.

Similarly, in this study, it is the wife who becomes the minority and adapts the husbands' native language after the marriage because of the patriarchal system adapted in Arunachal Pradesh. However, it is significant to note that 20 percent of the respondents also adopted their wife's native language. Most of these cases were common amongst the couples where the husband came from outside the state. For them it was more convenient to adopt the wife's native language so as to communicate efficiently and also the process of acculturation got more effective in the new setting.

### 5.3. Extended Family:

Family is the basic unit of society and thus has a significant role in every individual's existence in the society. Intercultural marriages are the union of not only two individuals with distinct cultures, but also the merger family, which includes mothers, fathers, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and relatives from diverse cultural background. When these two people come together, there are possibilities of harmonious gatherings and relationships can blossom. But at the same time, there can be conflicts and disagreement amongst them. Therefore, it is not just union of two individuals but of two families.

In this study many of the couples shared similar views that role of extended family does impact communication within the spouses. It was seen that both women and men considered the role of extended family in influencing their cultural adaptation by conveying societal norms to the intermarried families. The respondents asserted that their respective families had major role to play in the marital satisfaction and it was important for the couples to familiarize with each other's family as much as possible, which made it easier for both the families to accept a culturally diverse spouse.

### 5.4. Parenting:

The study revealed a radical change on the couple's relational dynamics when a child is born in the family. It was observed that prior to parenthood; the couples in this study would resolve conflicts by effective spousal communication. But once the child arrives in the family, many complications come into play, for instance the selection of the name of the child and whose language should the child speak. In this study, it was interesting to note that initially each of the spouse felt very strongly about his or her ideas that should be adopted to raise their child but eventually,



they become more flexible knowing that their basic motive is to give the best to the child. Others stressed the importance of respecting each other's cultures and also engage the children in this process of coalition.

However, interestingly it was found that 40 percent of children ended up speaking a third language which was mainly Hindi. Apart from Hindi, it was observed that the child was inclined towards the dominant culture and language of the father. It was also appealing to find from the study was that, children from the intercultural marriage background are able to speak and understand at least two to three languages which is an advantage over others.

### 5.5. Cultural Conflict:

It was evident that young couples who had been married for less than 10 years had issues of cultural difference which had an impact in their communication. Large percentage of them had experienced dissonance in the early years of their marriage due to vast difference in the culture. These conflicts included issues related to language, food choice, and parenting. Embracing the new culture was one aspect which almost all the women who were interviewed accepted as a major challenge. However, couples who were married for more than 30 years seem to have lesser problems over differences in their opinion and culture. But they admitted that there were clashes of culture in the initial period of marriage which they had learned to resolve over the years by communicating in the right way unlike during the initial period where they would often have arguments related to cultural differences.

### 6. CONCLUSION:

Our society has become more diverse and the globalization has changed the way we interact with each other. People increasingly travel around the world and have contact with others who differ from them in religion, ethnicity, race, nationality, and other characteristics that are often associated with different cultures. Consequently, with more opportunities for contact between people of different cultures and communities, the probability of forming intercultural relationships has also increased. Every individual belongs to a culture and it provides them with an implicit knowledge about how to behave in different situations and how to interpret other's behavior in such situations. So, when two different cultures integrate in the social construct of marriage, it forms different dynamics of communication within the individuals. Like mentioned earlier, all relationships are essentially complex. However, dimensions of differences are magnified for intercultural married couples and families because they combine at least two distinct cultures. The study made an attempt to evaluate different aspects of intercultural marriage and factors that impact the intercultural communication in such marriages.

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