

IBI Quarterly

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Dear Reader,

The achievements of the Indian economy have attracted a lot of attention over the past years. Again we are happy to provide you with an insider's view into the Indian culture of today, written by IBI Associates Lina Bilkha and Ann Means. Starting with the topic of marriage and love in India, they then move on to explain the difficulties that foreigners may experience when living and working in India up until they discover the hidden logic of the country.

Like the IBI Quarterly on China and Japan, the current edition once more offers you one reflection of the many changes taking place in our world today. The 4th and last IBI Quarterly, to be published in December, in 2006 will focus on the changes in Poland, written by IBI Associate Pawel Walentynowicz.

We hope you will enjoy this new IBI Quarterly and look forward to your response.

Ursula Brinkmann, Ph.D.
Intercultural Business Improvement

Pyaar Ho Jayega

Lina Bilkha and Ann Means

At one of our recent workshops in Europe with participants from India and some European countries we noticed the interest the Europeans evinced in the topic of arranged marriages. (The majority of marriages in India are arranged – in Mumbai, according to a recent estimate, 95%, in cities such as Chennai and Bangalore 98%. In rural India, it is highly unusual for a married not to be arranged.

Families looking for suitable spouses for their children will try to match religion, values, education levels, personality and sometimes horoscopes. During the question and answer session, the Europeans wanted to know how educated, articulate Indians, like their colleagues, could agree to marry someone whom their families chose for them. After all – isn't marriage the expression of love between two individuals? The Indians in turn explained that, for educated urban professionals today it is no longer the norm to meet your marriage partner only once or twice before the wedding ceremony, and to marry without consultation anyone selected by their parents. However, although one or two of our Indian participants had 'love marriages', most had married spouses chosen by their families. Usually they had had some choice, meeting prospective partners and being encouraged to refuse a match where they simply did not get on. What most did not expect or even want was to marry for love. As they explained, in an Indian marriage, "pyaar ho jayega", love "will happen" as the couple live together, work and found a family. (One of our European participants was curious as to when "love happens". His Indian counterpart answered that it normally takes about two years. "Humph" replied our European. "You

mean, about the time it goes, in a Western marriage....."). Happiness and love in an arranged marriage are the result not only of shared values, but also of a process over time of mutual cooperation and adaptation in terms of adjusting to your partners' family, a shared religion, eating habits, class and status. A lot of the homework is already done for you in an arranged marriage !

For many expatriates the first experience of living and doing business in India is far from love at first sight. Initial impressions are often concentrated on poor infrastructure, highly visible poverty, and seemingly impenetrable bureaucracy along with somewhat opaque systems. Frustrations at differing concepts of time, and impatience with hierarchical structures can make for a stormy introduction to the Indian context. However, very much like the arranged marriage, once the initial three month period is over, one can with patience see through the layers and see a system appear. The foreigner who is prepared to work at understanding the strengths of Indian culture and its underlying values, will begin to appreciate the dynamism, flexibility and creativity that brings increasing numbers of overseas firms to the subcontinent. Recent observations made by an expatriate employee of a world renowned hotel chain sum it up beautifully. He said that while working in one of the countries in South East Asia he was so impressed by the infrastructure and systems in place that he thought that this surpassed even some Western countries. But after the three month 'honeymoon period' of his contract there he saw the cracks beginning to appear. He commented "once the veneer peeled off, it was chaos". He contrasted this with his experience in India. His first impressions of India were



“chaos and poverty and lack of systems”. Only later did he begin to appreciate how to get things done, and, like many foreigners in India, developed deep admiration and affection for the country and its people. As in an arranged marriage, “love came”.

When we think of our client companies where we have seen successful “marriages” of expatriate and local staff, we can in many cases trace the process of mutual adaptation which has led to successful teams. Indian staff have learnt the logic and importance of deadlines, expatriates have learnt how flexibility is a huge strength. Indians have learnt that multitasking can work to the detriment of quality, foreigners have learnt that in many cases a task does not require 100% concentration. Foreigners have learnt to navigate the subtleties of high context communication, Indians have learnt to refine and clarify messages. Foreigners have learnt to appreciate how a sense of fun can speed work along, Indians have learnt that for some of their foreign colleagues the more light-hearted comments are more welcome outside of the business meeting.....

As one of our European clients stated recently: “the expatriates who come to India fall into one of two categories: they either love it or they hate it. But no one is indifferent to it.” Most foreigners would agree that doing business in India can be demanding and difficult, and that building a successful organisation involves understanding, willingness to adapt, and establishing a shared value base. But, in business as in life, with mutual efforts, rewards can come – “pyar ho jaega”.

To find out more about our India programs and Expatriation Services, please contact us at info@ibinet.nl.

What makes IBI special

The Intercultural Readiness Check (IRC), a valid and reliable self-assessment tool. More than 6,000 people, all working in an international context, have filled in the IRC. This makes the IRC database one of the world’s largest sources of information on intercultural competences. In just three years, we have built a world-wide network of 80 IRC Licensees.

IBI has developed a unique approach for coaching expatriates and their partners, integrating in-depth assessment, coaching and country-briefings to make your investment pay off.

We have created a tight network of seasoned intercultural professionals that support you in doing business in four economically vital regions: Asia, North America, and Central and Eastern Europe.

Frequent exchange and supervision ensure the high quality of our services.

IBI cooperates with researchers specialized in analyzing large databases for continuous quality checks of the IRC questionnaire within a changing world and globalizing business.

IBI stands out with its partnerships of specialists to cover the strategic, operational and personal challenges of your work in an international environment.

If you want to find out more about how we can support you in strengthening the intercultural competences of your staff, please contact Ursula Brinkmann, Ph.D., at ursula@ibinet.nl. We look forward to speaking with you.

