



## **Intercultural Story - India:**

### **„A Monsoon Wedding – The best day of your life“**

#### **... and what we can transfer from this real life story to the business world**

Imagine the following scenario:

“The bride awakes at the crack of dawn ... There is excitement all around! Family, friends, Jack and Shadow (the family pets) are all immersed in the celebrations ...

The rituals are performed ... The bride is bathed and beautified with Jasmine oil, and a paste made of milk, flour and turmeric. She is wearing the most beautiful wedding dress in the whole of Punjab<sup>1</sup>, and is adorned with precious jewels.

“What a beautiful picture” (cries everyone) ... but ... The bride checks her attire, everything is perfect ... However, there is something missing ... What? She has all her accessories, but one! The HANDBAG! Where is “Cinderella’s handbag” that is supposed to match her wedding gown? Oh yes, sure enough the family forgot to buy the bride her wedding handbag! She feels incomplete. But no worries ... Superman (her big brother) is here to save the day (the reason for his existence)!

“The Monsoon Wedding”, as I call it, is one of the most important and prestigious festivals in India. The middle and upper class families go to town to make it the best day of their child’s life. Everything is done to perfection from the wedding dress to the venue and the “Handbag”! Even though the handbag was missing a few hours before the wedding, the family managed to get the bride “the perfect one” just in time!

So far the true story (which features my sister in law) – what can we witness from this story, what can we analyse, and how can we use culture as a resource for interpretation?

**JIT (Just in Time)** is a matter of fact in India. In business, most deadlines are met just in time! The Indians are renowned for getting things done at the last minute ... They will complete the tasks even if it means staying up all night to do so and to perfection. Indians are also known to be perfectionists and they like to impress their bosses and western counterparts.

If you are engaged with an Indian organisation and have to conduct business in India, and like the “Monsoon Wedding”, you would like it to be the best deal of your life, then you need to bear the following points in mind:

- The Indians are one of the best **host nations** I know; they will bend over backwards to please their guests. Most business in India is conducted either in a restaurant or in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Punjab is a geographical region straddling the border between Pakistan and India which includes Punjab province in Pakistan and the states of the Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh and Delhi in India.

premises of the family home. If you ever get an invitation to a family home, it is polite not to turn it down! Being amongst an Indian family is the ideal opportunity to give you an insight into the Indian culture. You will be amazed at how much information you can collect about Indians in one night, as Indians like to engage in conversation!

- The **family plays an important role** for the Indians. Sometimes the family comes before business. For example if a child is sick within the family, an Indian CEO (Chief Executive Officer) will first take care of his/her sick child and then attend to business.
- **Indian organisations are extremely hierarchical.** The decision making process is different to that in most Western countries. Indian companies are in fact Silos, which means all decisions are made at the highest level and filtered down the vertical chain. Hence, if you have an important deal to close, then you need to ensure that your sponsor is the CEO of the organisation.
- Indians have a **relaxed approach to deadlines** and have the tendency to leave tasks to the last minute. You as the Western counterpart need to emphasise the importance of each deadline and clarify and underline that it is the European/American deadline!
- **Project Management** - it is important to manage the project closely with regular meetings and updates to the project. It is in your interest to ensure that each meeting is recorded for reference later.
- **Indians are very task oriented** and will only do what is required of the task(s), nothing more and nothing less. As already mentioned, the company structure is hierarchical, therefore subordinates follow instructions from above, and will only complete what is required of them. Subordinates do not take their own initiative and are reactive rather than proactive. If you would like to implement a more Western approach, then you need to integrate this within the company culture. However, this may be quite challenging for a Western CEO.
- Another very important attribute to know about Indians is that it is a very **“yes” culture** (which is true for most of Asia). Indians tend to say “yes” to most things, even the body language (the nodding of the head), is an indication that they tend to agree to most decisions. Saying “yes” is also a way of saving face or looking competent. Your job is to be an “Ambassador” and create a safe environment for the Indians where it is ok to say “no” if they don’t understand a specific task/job or disagree with a decision. It is better to create a safe and open company culture rather than pay an expensive price later.
- Indians today expect to be paid a **competitive salary**. They have now realised their potential and know that they are highly competent especially in the IT market. Most Indians are not loyal and will go to where the most “cash” is offered! Therefore make sure you offer a competitive salary otherwise you could risk losing key stakeholders during an important phase of a project!
- **Delays ... Learn to accept delays!** Indians are renowned for not arriving on time to meetings - and even to their own weddings! There is a good reason for this ... The infrastructure in India is horrendous. In major cities it takes the locals hours to get to work due to traffic, bad road conditions etc., therefore scheduling a meeting on time is beyond anyone’s control! In addition, in a country where traditions and rituals play an important role, it is important to know and understand the importance of starting the day with a prayer. Some people will also go to a local temple before starting work . Do not be surprised if the CEO starts conducting a special religious ritual in his office before attending the meeting.

If you bear these points in mind then your joint-venture with an Indian organisation is sure to be a “happy marriage” and an everlasting “Honeymoon”!

If you want to learn more about doing business in India – with Indian people, our expert Amarpal Sohi Kaur is at your disposal to help steer your venture towards success! Give us a call + 49. (0)6221 – 735 13 71 or send us an [E-Mail](#), we look forward to hearing from you and working together with you.