**Acculturation Attitudes, Psychological and Social Well-Being of Ao and Lotha Tribes in Nagaland**

**ABSTRACT**

Acculturation is a process concerning two or more cultural contact groups with consequences for both dominant and non-dominant groups. However, the contact experiences have much greater impact on the non-dominant group such as tribe and its members. Thus, the present study examined the acculturation attitudes, psychological and social well-being of Ao and Lotha Tribes. A sample of 100 participants, within the age group of 20-30 years, was recruited from two major tribes; Ao (n=50) and Lotha (n=50) of Nagaland in North-Eastern India using convenient sampling. Results revealed no significant difference between Ao and Lotha Tribes with respect to acculturation attitudes, psychological and social well-being. In both Ao and Lotha Tribe, the most favored acculturation attitudes were co-existence and integration while assimilation and marginalization were least preferred attitudes among them It was also noted that Ao and Lotha tribes preferred separation acculturation attitudes along with integration and co-existence. The members of both Ao and Lotha tribes have reported greater psychological and social well-being. It suggests that integration and co-existence acculturation attitudes promote psychological and social well-being in a multicultural society.

**Keywords**: Acculturation attitudes, tribes, psychological and social well-being.

**INTRODUCTION**

Acculturation can be defined as “the change in individuals whose primary learning has been in one culture and who take over traits from another culture” (Marden & Meyer, 1968). “Acculturation is a process that can occur when two or more cultures interact. It also refers to culture change as a result of continuous first-hand contact of two independent cultural groups over an extended period of time” (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936). Furthermore, Berry defined acculturation as a process concerning two or more cultural groups "with consequences for both; in effect however, the contact experiences have much greater impact on the non-dominant group and its members". “In the 1954 formulation by the Social Science Research Council” (SSRC, 1954), acculturation was defined as “...culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequences, and the operation of role determinants and personality factors” (p. 974).

Acculturation is not a new area of study, since scholars have studied and researched the area since the 1930s. Unfortunately, though, a communication approach to the study of acculturation has been minimal and only in recent years a focal point of acculturation research. Yet, communication is essential to acculturation. Communication is the tool assisting people to satisfy their basic personal and social needs in the new host culture. To acculturate themselves to the new culture, people must acquire the host cultural patterns and develop working relationships with the new environment. This cultural awareness process and then necessary adaptation is facilitated by communication. To the extent people master the communication process of the host culture, they will become acculturated. Young Kim (1980) has contributed “the most extensive research toward defining acculturation from a communication perspective. Communication is viewed as central to the acculturation process”.

Thus, “acculturation occurs through the identification and the internalization of the significant symbols of the host society” (Kim, 1980, p. 378). With communication competence central to the acculturation process, it is obvious that one learns to communicate by communicating. As Kim (1980) explains: “The acculturation process, therefore, is an interactive and continuous process that evolves in and through the communication of an immigrant with the new sociocultural environment. The acquired communication competence, in turn, reflects the degree of that immigrant’s acculturation" (p. 380).

The *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* on culture change, Berry (1977) indicates increased attention toward the psychological aspects of acculturation because “in recent years psychologists themselves have increasingly engaged themselves with a range of psychological variables which are thought to precede and stem from changes in a cultural system”. Some of the variables identified by Berry (1980) include “cognitive style, personality, identity, attitudes, acculturative stress, and language. Language development and fluency is the sole communication-oriented variable in the group”.

Berry (1980) views “acculturation as adaptation, the reduction of conflict, which is conceptualized in three modes: adjustment, reaction, and withdrawal. He advocates a three-phase course to acculturation: contact, conflict, and adaptation. Contact is a core concept to the acculturation process. The nature, permanence, purpose, and duration of contact contribute to acculturation phenomena”. Berry states that “the least acculturation may take place where there is no purpose (contact is accidental), where trade is mutually desired, or where contact is short-lived; the greatest acculturation will take place where the purpose is a deliberate takeover of a society (e.g., by invasion) or of its skills or beliefs (e.g., by settlement)”. Berry (1995, 1997) later posited “two basic dimensions of acculturation: maintenance of original cultural identity and maintenance of relations with other groups. By extension, he advocates four acculturation strategies: integration, separation, assimilation and marginalization”.

***Integration*** refers to those individuals who value both cultural maintenance and intergroup relations. In other words, the person accepts the new culture, while maintaining close ties with his original culture. ***Separation*** is described to those who advocate cultural maintenance but do not value intergroup relations. Separation occurs when a person rejects his new culture and lives according to the customs of his original culture. ***Assimilation*** refers to a rejection of cultural identity and the adoption of the host culture. ***Marginalization*** describes those who value neither cultural maintenance nor intergroup relations. Those people who no longer feel comfortable with their heritage, but the new culture does not appeal to them either. Research in India has also identified “**Coexistence**” as another important acculturation strategy (Mishra, Sinha, & Berry, 1996). It has been regarded as a major strategy displayed by Indian people for dealing with inroads from other cultures (Sinha, et al, 1988; Sinha & Tripathi, 1994). “In this case, no attempt is made towards synthesis or assimilation of new elements; instead they are “enfolded” in the system and kept side by side with the pre-existing elements without involving their evaluation or placing any standards of comparison” (Mishra, et al, 2017; Berry, et al., 2021).

According to study (Krishnan & Berry, 1992) which focuses on “the acculturation process of Indian American immigrants with respect to their dress, food, marriage customs, religion and language. As Indians have a very diverse and rich culture going back to thousands of years, one can assume that it may be very difficult for them to change or adapt to a new culture and tradition when they immigrate to America”. The study concluded that the attitude affects the process of acculturation. Such as when the immigrants prepare to go to America, they may have decided to assimilate into the culture. However, upon arrival they discover that they reject some customs of their new country. As a result, they change their attitude from assimilation to integration. Thus, the attitude changes according to the various traits of the immigrants.

There are lots of studies on acculturation orientation but very few studies reported in the Indian context particularly in relation to tribal groups. Thus, the present study was conducted to examine the acculturation orientation and well-being of Ao Tribe and Lotha Tribe as there was no study yet in that area. Thus, the present study is aimed to examine cultural identity, acculturation strategies, attitudes, life-satisfaction, psychological and socio-cultural competence of Ao and Lotha Tribes.

**METHODOLOGY**

**SAMPLE:**

This study was carried out with 100 participants (Male=50 & Female=50) of Ao and Lotha Tribe with the age group varies from 20-30 years, residing in Mokokchung and Wokha district of Nagaland respectively. Nagaland is situated in the North-East of India, consisting of 11 districts and the state is inhabited by 16 major Tribes i.e., such as: Angami, Ao, Chang, Chakhesang, Khiamniungam, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema, Yimchunger, Zeliang, Kuki and Kachari.. Each Tribe is unique in character with its own distinct customs, language and dress. The Naga ancestors migrated to the present location in different groups and they remained confined to their ridges and mountain terrain.  As a result, they have the unique quality of appearing to be both one ethnic group and multiple tribes, displaying the cultural ethos of India i.e., “unity in diversity” in their political systems, traditions, customs, and attire.

The Ao Naga tribe inhibits the district of Mokokchung and they are known as‘Tzuiner’ which means ‘power to swim’. They believed that their ancestors emerged from Lungterok. Lotha tribe (Kyong) is one of the major tribes in Nagaland. The name Lotha is given by the Britishers, however, the Lotha Tribe refer to themselves as ‘Kyong'. Wokha is the home and headquarter of Lotha (Kyong) tribe. Lothas (Kyongs) trace their origin in Kezakhenoma (Sharma & Sharma, 2005). Apart from the tribal languages, English is in predominant use. According to the census of 2011, it has about 2 million populations.

**MEASURES**

An instrument (Berry, 2005) had been developed in MIRIPS (Mutual Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies) project that was used to collect the data with the Ao and Lotha Tribes. The questionnaires consisted of demographic information about the participant’s age, gender, education, socio-economic status, Tribe origin, neighborhood Tribe composition, languages known, travel experience along with other variables: cultural identity (11 items), acculturation attitudes (20 items); *integration (4 items), co-existence (4 items), separation (4 items), assimilation (4 items), marginalization (4 items),* self-esteem (10 items), life satisfaction (5 items), psychological problems (15 items), socio-cultural competence (20 items).

**RESULTS**:

This study examined the cultural identity, acculturation attitudes, self-esteem, life satisfaction, psychological problems, socio-cultural competence of Ao and Lotha Tribes. Data was analyzed to find out the differences between these two Tribes in regard to their cultural identity, acculturation attitudes and psychological (i.e., self-esteem, life satisfaction, psychological problems) and social well-being (i.e., social competence).

**TABLE 1: CULTURAL IDENTITY AND ACCULTURATION ATTITUDES**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **AO**  **Tribe** | **LOTHA**  **Tribe** | **t-value** | **p-value** |
| **Cultural Identity**  Mean  SD | 39.80  10.16 | 38.92  1.75 | 0.62 | 0.94 |
| **Integration Acculturation Attitude**  Mean  SD | 17.68  2.7 | 18.00  1.9 | 0.068 | 0.79 |
| **Co-existence Acculturation Attitude**  Mean  SD | 16.85  2.3 | 17.09  2.0 | 0.054 | 0.66 |
| **Assimilation Acculturation Attitude**  Mean  SD | 6.24  2.10 | 5.56  2.01 | 0.89 | 0.35 |
| **Separation Acculturation Attitude**  Mean  SD | 9.84  3.01 | 10.48  2.68 | 0.89 | 0.35 |
| **Marginalization Acculturation Attitude**  Mean  SD | 6.78  2.27 | 5.50  1.68 | 0.48 | 0.48 |

Table 1: shows no significant difference between Ao and Lotha Tribes for cultural identity measure. The Mean scores of Ao (mean= 37.36) and Lotha (mean=38.70) samples revealed that both Tribes endorsed strong cultural identity but slightly higher among the Lotha Tribe.

Further, it indicates no significant difference between Ao and Lotha Tribes on acculturation attitudes (i.e., integration, co-existence, assimilation, separation and marginalization). However, the Lotha tribe displayed a slightly stronger integration (mean=18.00), coexistence (mean=17.09) and separation (mean=10.48) attitudes than the Ao Tribe (mean=17.68, 16.85, 9.84 respectively). While marginalization and assimilation attitudes were greater among Ao Tribe (mean=6.78, 6.24 respectively) compared to Lotha Tribe (mean=5.50, 5,56 respectively). Integration and co-existence were more preferred attidues whereas assimilation and marginalization were least preferred acculturation attitudes among Ao and Lotha Tribes. It was also noted that separation was preferred by both Ao and Lotha Tribes.

**TABLE 2: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **AO**  **Tribe** | **LOTHA**  **Tribe** | **t-value** | **p-value** |
| **Self-Esteem**  Mean  SD | 36.68  4.56 | 36.32  4.98 | 0.65 | 0.42 |
| **Life Satisfaction**  Mean  SD | 17.92  3.39 | 17.30  3.14 | 0.88 | 0.35 |
| **Psychological**  **problem**  Mean  SD | 38.14  7.52 | 37.78  6.50 | 0.46 | 0.49 |
| **Social competency**  Mean  SD | 80.34  9.62 | 82.28  9.27 | 0.15 | 0.69 |

Table 2 indicates no significant difference between Ao and Lotha Tribes on the psychological (self-esteem, life satisfaction, psychological problems) and social well-being (social competence). The social competency was higher in the Lotha Tribe (mean=82.28) than the Ao Tribe (mean=80.34). Both Ao and Lotha Tribes expressed positive self-esteem, greater life satisfaction, exhibited more social competence and experienced less psychological problems.

**DISCUSSION**

Findings of the present study shows that cultural identity among the Lotha is greater than the Ao which reveals that they feel proud for being part of their tribal culture. Meanwhile, the Lotha Tribe also displayed a stronger integration attitude than the Ao. This indicates that the Lotha Tribe are able to adapt other cultural norms and traditions but also maintain their own culture of origin. They prefer to have a social activity which involves their Tribe as well as other Tribes and prefers to have friends from others Tribe too. Though there is no significant difference between the Tribes regarding assimilation and separation attitudes of acculturation. They preferred separation over the assimilation acculturation attitudes. The separation attitude exists among both the Tribes which means they feel that own Tribe should maintain their cultural traditions and not adopt to other culture, preferring to have social activities involving own Tribe members. However, their attitude might change where situation prevails or they venture out and experience some exposure. Berry (1990) suggests that these options should not be viewed as independent of the nature of the host society. In societies where cultural diversity is valued, tolerated and encouraged, integration and separation are more likely to occur. In societies that have expectations a policy to reduce cultural diversity, assimilation and marginalization are the more likely options. Studies carried out with Aboriginal groups and Native people in Australia and Canada (Berry, 1976; Sommerlad & Berry, 1970)and with tribal people in undivided Bihar (Mishra, et al, 1996) offer support to these contentions.

The coexistence attitude is also evident among the Tribes which means that in the course of acculturation the preference of tribal people is to keep the elements of own and external culture together. There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate coexistence of desperate cultural elements in various walks of life of the Indian people (Mishra, Bano 2003; Sinha & Tripathi, 1994, Mishra, Bano, Tripathi, 2017). In view or the government policy and the general programmes aimed at integration of Tribals in the mainstream society with due regard for their cultural identity, this was the most likely expectation. To this extent the findings are consistent with those of others who have attempted to assess peoples' acculturation attitudes in multicultural societies (Berry et al., 1989;Mishra et al, 1996; Mishra, et al., 2017; Bano, Mishra & Tripathi, 2024; Ward & Szabó, 2023).

According to the result, marginalization attitude shows greater among the Ao Tribe which means that it may develop in the early phases of acculturation when people are not able to decide upon the course of action for themselves. When the contact crosses a threshold point, other modes of acculturation tend to develop that can potentially reduce the feelings of marginalization (Berry et al., 1989;Berry, 2022;Mishra et al, 1996; Sharma & Sharma, 2005). The socio-cultural context in which the Tribal people are enfolded in India may be one of the plausible reasons for this.

The findings for the variables such as self-esteem and life satisfaction measures the psychological well-being, that the Ao Tribe scored higher than the Lotha Tribe. It revealed that the Ao Tribe shown more positive self-perception, acceptance, confidence in their opinion, makes effective use of opportunities and has a sense of mastering in managing environmental factors and activities including managing everyday affairs and creating situations to benefit personal needs. They tend to have strong goal orientation and conviction that life holds meaning. The Lotha Tribe displayed more social competency than the Ao Tribe which indicates that the Lotha Tribe possess certain social, emotional and intellectual skills and behaviors for social adaptation. The integration hypothesis (Berry, 2005, 2017; 2015; Berry, et al., 2021) presumed that individuals, who are endorsing integration and co-existence acculturation attitudes, showed higher levels of psychological and social well-being in a multicultural society (Mishra, et. al., 2017, Tripathi, 2020).

**CONCLUSIONS**

It can be concluded that no significant difference between Ao and Lotha Tribes was evident with respect to acculturation attitudes, psychological and social well-being. It reveals that integration and co-existence acculturation attitudes were more preferred attitudes in both Tribes than marginalization and assimilation. The Ao and Lotha Tribes also preferred separation acculturation attitudes, suggesting that they were interested in maintaining their cultural identity and heritage as well as they also willing to acculturate with the mainstream society following the cultural ethos of co-existence in our context.

**IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The findings of this study are largely in support of the studies (Berry et al., 1989; 2005; 2017; Mishra et al, 1996; Mishra, et al., 2017; Bano, Mishra & Tripathi, 2018, 2022, 2024) of acculturation attitudes, psychological and social well-being in a multicultural society like India including their potential for application in real life. The findings might helpful for the policy makers how to design the policy for promoting integration of the Tribal groups into mainstream society, providing them to preserve their Tribal cultural identity and heritage (e.g., separation acculturation attitude), followed with integration and co-existence acculturation attitudes. However, the way to express the acculturation attitudes among Ao and Lotha Tribes reveals culture-specific variations that restrict the generalization without considering cultural contexts and background of the individuals and groups. It suggests that we need to extend this study in diverse Tribal cultural contexts of India, using mix methods, in order to get the depth knowledge about the diversity of the Tribal community that would contribute to the psychological research of Tribes.

**Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)**

Option 1:

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript. NA

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