

Interfaith Unions: Understanding the Dynamics, Acceptance, and Resilience of Interfaith Couples

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the emotional dynamics and challenges faced by interfaith couples in India. Through interviews with seven couples, themes of relationship satisfaction, conversion experiences, acceptance, and resilience are explored. Findings highlight a shift towards equitable gender roles and the importance of communication in conflict resolution. Despite societal and legal hurdles, couples demonstrate resilience through mutual support and the creation of new traditions. Acceptance of religious differences emerges as crucial for fostering unity. By addressing gaps in existing research, this study aims to promote tolerance and inclusivity in diverse relationships. This study underscores the importance of understanding the lived experiences of interfaith couples in India, shedding light on unique societal attitudes and legal frameworks that shape their realities. By addressing gaps in existing research, the study aims to promote tolerance, safeguard individual rights, and contribute to the development of a more inclusive society that celebrates diversity in relationships.

Keywords: *Interfaith couples, Acceptance, dynamics, resilience, Conflict resolution, Societal attitudes, Interfaith marriages*

INTRODUCTION

Interfaith marriages, defined as unions between individuals from different religious backgrounds, navigate the complexities of religious diversity and societal perceptions, particularly in countries like India characterized by religious pluralism [1]. While interfaith unions have the potential to foster social tolerance and inclusivity, they face resistance rooted in cultural norms and religious traditions [2]. Recent studies by Pew Research Center India, indicate that despite India's ethos of religious tolerance, a majority of Hindus and Muslims perceive significant differences between religious communities, emphasizing the importance of maintaining religious boundaries in marital unions [2]. Yet this study reveals many Indians consider that it “somewhat” important to stop people from pursuing marriages that are outside their religious community. Nearly all the religions show the gap in opinion of the same, among which 82% of Muslims believe that religion is considered very important and stopping inter-religious marriages are important. This study also revealed that Hindus who favour the BJP are more likely to stop interfaith marriage and are in favor to stop interfaith marriages.

Additionally, societal perceptions and media portrayals contribute to the challenges faced by interfaith couples. Media narratives often sensationalize conflicts stemming from religious differences, perpetuating

stereotypes and fostering societal skepticism [2]. Concerns such as "love jihad" and perceptions of religious conversions as taboo further complicate interfaith unions, contributing to societal stigmas. However, interfaith couples demonstrate resilience in navigating these challenges, emphasizing acceptance and adaptive practices to foster strong relationships[3] Understanding the dynamics of resilience within interfaith marriages is crucial for promoting acceptance and mitigating societal stigmas [4]. Moreover, legal frameworks such as the Special Marriage Act (SMA) provide a progressive avenue for interfaith unions in India. However, challenges persist due to logistical hurdles and evolving societal dynamics, necessitating ongoing dialogue to enhance support for interfaith couples [2]. In light of these complexities, this study aims to explore the dynamics of interfaith couples in marriages, focusing on the role of acceptance and resilience in their success. By examining societal perceptions, legal challenges, and relational dynamics, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of interfaith marriages and their significance in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity. Moreover, previous studies have shed light on the challenges faced by interfaith couples, emphasizing the importance of mutual respect, openness, and understanding in navigating differences. However, there remains a gap in research addressing critical issues such as new conversion trends, rising religious intolerance, and challenges in raising children within interfaith marriages.[5,1] Therefore, this study aims to explore the dynamics of interfaith couples in marriages, focusing on the role of acceptance and resilience in their success. Research on interfaith couples in India has overlooked critical issues like new conversion trends, rising religious intolerance, and challenges in raising children. Understanding these complexities is essential for promoting tolerance and safeguarding individual rights. By filling these gaps, this research seeks to highlight the strengths and adaptability of

interfaith couples amidst societal, legal, and familial challenges, ultimately shedding light on the positive aspects of interfaith unions.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The research explores the interactions between interfaith couples and the roles of acceptance and resilience in their marriages. Through narrative analysis, the study delves into couples' emotional experiences and aims to highlight positive aspects that are often overlooked. The research design involves interviews with seven interfaith couples, focusing on predetermined themes related to relationship dynamics, acceptance, and resilience.

Operational Definitions:

- **Relationship Dynamics:** Complex ways interfaith couples connect, including relationship satisfaction.
- **Acceptance:** Level of acceptance and value placed on interfaith marriages, including sacrifices and common traditions.
- **Resilience:** Couples' capacity to overcome obstacles through shared ideals and inner strength.

Research Design

Seven interfaith couples were interviewed as part of a qualitative study using inductive narrative analysis. Questionnaire was used to conduct a structured interview guided by predetermined categories, the study focuses on themes pertaining to Relationship Dynamics and Child Rearing, Role of Religion in Relationship and Conversion, Conflicts in Family Life and Conflict Resolution, Role of Acceptance and Creating Shared Traditions, Resilience.

Objectives

- Explore the dynamics within interfaith couples concerning types of conflict, conflict resolution and quality of marital life and child-rearing decisions
- To Assess overall relationship satisfaction among interfaith couples,

considering the impact of religious diversity.

- To examine the experiences of conversion and explore the conversion process within interfaith relationships and its implications for the couple.
- Explore emotional responses to losses, sacrifices, and the feelings of anger, guilt, or confusion within interfaith unions

Investigate the role of acceptance of each other differences in overcoming challenges within interfaith relationships

Explore the process of building new traditions and cultivating common values among interfaith couples

Examine family and societal perceptions and reactions towards interfaith unions.

Identify factors influencing the resilience of interfaith couples in the face of external challenges.

Sampling procedure and technique

Questions were developed based on pre-established primary themes in an organised interview approach with participants. A rigorous approach to obtaining insights in line with the predetermined themes was ensured by approaching seven couples for the interviews.

Inclusion criteria

- People aged 18 and above (male/female)
- Couples who are in interfaith marriage
- The participant should be living with the partner of the other religion at the moment.

One among the couple should be Indian

Exclusion criteria

- People who are separated, divorced or living away from the partner (long distance marriage)
- Both The partners are from abroad (not Indian citizen)

Procedure of the study

An online questionnaire was circulated among people in interfaith marriages. The questionnaire included demographic details like name, age, sex, number, email, religion, partner's religion, number of years that you have been married, do you have any children. The questionnaire also included questions related to the day and time the participant wanted to schedule the interview. Those who were interested were further contacted and were sent Zoom meeting links via WhatsApp/email. At the time of the interview, they were asked to join five minutes early to check for connection problems and glitches. Before starting the interview verbal consent was taken. The verbal consent included, the willingness to participate in the research, The objective of the research, confidentiality and the purpose of the study. The consent to record was also taken. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Following familiarisation with the transcripts, initial codes were constructed using deductive coding, which involves coding on pre-established codes. Similar codes were deciphered and incorporated into the pre-established themes. Tables 1 provides detailed demographic information for the participants.

Table 1: Demographic information for the participants

Pseudonyms	Age	Religion of Husband	Religion of Wife	Years of marriage	Number of children
PF1-PM2	29-30	Muslim	Hindu	02 years	NA
PF2-PM2	29-29	Hindu	Christian	02 years	NA
PF3-PM3	42-43	Christian	Sikh	08 years	01
PF4-PM4	24-24	Hindu	Muslim	03 months	NA
PF5-PM5	32-28	Muslim	Hindu	01 year	NA
PF6-PM6	33-34	Hindu	Christian	05 years	NA
PF7-PM7	29-30	Muslim	Hindu	03 months	NA

Ethical considerations

- Only individuals who willingly consented to participate in the research

were approached for interviews, ensuring respect for autonomy and choice.

- Prior to the interview, participants were verbally presented with detailed information about the research, and their willingness to participate was explicitly confirmed.
- Participants were informed that they have the right to refuse to disclose certain data or withdraw from the research at any point without consequences.
- Explicit informed consent was obtained from participants regarding the recording of interviews, emphasizing transparency and respect for privacy.
- Participants were assured that pseudonyms and fictionalised details of their names and places of origin would be used, safeguarding their identity and maintaining confidentiality. Participants were encouraged to halt the interview at any point if they encountered discomfort or found any question to be sensitive or intrusive.
- A thorough check for discomfort was conducted at the end of each interview, ensuring participants had the opportunity to share any aspects not covered or express any discomfort experienced during the interview process.
- These ethical considerations aim to prioritise the well-being, autonomy, and confidentiality of the participants throughout the research process.

RESULT

The Study gathered information from 7 couples, data had 7 males and 7 females aged between 24-35. The couples belonged to diverse religious backgrounds, wherein the Hindu and Muslim couples were four Christian and Hindu couples were two, Sikh and Christian were one.

Case 1

Couple one, residing in Kerala's capital Trivandrum, has been married for two years in an interfaith union. P1F, a 29-year-old Hindu, and P1M, a 30-year-old Muslim, met during their bachelor's degree and are currently employed. Despite initial doubts, particularly from P1F who hesitated due to

uncertainties about religious differences, they pursued their relationship, with P1M's assurance gradually easing P1F's concerns. Their marriage faced challenges, including societal perceptions and family pressures, leading to numerous breakups and reconciliations during courtship. Ultimately, they married under the Special Marriage Act, foregoing religious ceremonies due to concerns about societal consequences. They also informally engaged in a religious conversion, driven by fears from P1M's family regarding societal repercussions. Adjusting to married life proved difficult initially, with conflicts arising from responsibilities and expectations. Despite these hurdles, they maintain respect for each other's religious beliefs, celebrating traditional festivals together. P1F's occasional adaptation, like wearing a hijab, reflects her commitment to honoring P1M's family and their religion, despite societal misperceptions. While P1F misses her Hindu rituals, she values the freedom to practice her beliefs independently.

Their relationship thrives on effective communication and prioritizing each other over external influences. P1F emphasizes the resilience derived from their bond, highlighting the emptiness felt when apart and affirming the importance of problem-solving together.

Case 2

Couple two, both 29 years old and working in Zurich, has been in an interfaith relationship for about two years. P2F is Christian, while P2M is Hindu. They met during college and initially didn't consider religious differences. However, P2F worried about potential family reactions, especially given her Orthodox Christian background. Despite ups and downs, they continued dating, eventually marrying under the Special Marriage Act with Hindu and Christian ceremonies. Their marriage faced challenges, particularly from P2F's Orthodox Christian family, who initially opposed the union. Although conflicts arise, they largely stem from typical couple dynamics rather

than religious differences. Both respect each other's faiths, celebrating festivals and rituals together. P2F's family struggled with acceptance initially, such as P2F being called "Lakshmi" by P2M's grandfather, but eventually accepted her true name. Moreover, at P2M's family's home, there was pressure for P2F to participate in traditional practices like pooja and cooking. However, she asserted her independence due to her work commitments and personal beliefs, finding satisfaction in their relationship through mutual understanding and respect for each other's beliefs. They prioritize allowing each other to explore their religions independently, fostering a strong bond despite challenges.

Case 3

The couple, married for 8 years with a daughter, comprises a Sikh wife and a husband from a Christian background. Introduced by a mutual friend, they faced manageable challenges from their open-minded families. While not devout, they uphold religious traditions and festivals. Marrying first in a gurdwara posed hurdles due to their different faiths, requiring a hefty donation. The subsequent legal process under the Special Marriage Act also presented challenges. Nonetheless, they're content with their marriage, prioritizing mutual respect and shared family values. Their daughter is taught to embrace humanity and respect all religions, reflecting their commitment to fostering acceptance and understanding. While conflicts arise from daily adjustments, they've navigated religious differences smoothly. Despite past challenges with the husband's ex-wife's religious ceremony, their shared values and acceptance of each other's families have fortified their successful marriage.

Case 4

The fourth couple, both aged 24 and originally from Maharashtra but now residing in New Delhi, faced significant familial opposition due to their interfaith marriage. P4F is Muslim while P2M belongs

to Hindu family. Despite being Muslim and Hindu, they found common ground while working together at an NGO, where their friendship blossomed into love. Seeking refuge from family pressures, they turned to Dhanak, an NGO supporting interfaith couples, which helped them navigate bureaucratic challenges in solemnizing their marriage under the Special Marriage Act.

Their families' resistance forced them to flee for their safety, but they found solace in their bond, creating new traditions and celebrating festivals with friends in the city. Despite conflicts over dietary differences, their relationship thrives on mutual respect and care. They prioritize each other, finding strength in their shared experiences and unwavering commitment to acceptance and unconditional love. Their resilience and dependence on each other underscore the profound bond they share, forged amidst adversity and strengthened by their shared journey of finding sanctuary in each other's arms.

Case 5

P5F, a Hindu, and P5M, a Muslim, have been married for over a year and reside in Mumbai. They met during their MBA studies and embarked on a relationship, initially not considering their religious differences. However, their path to marriage was challenging, with P5F's family opposing the union, leading to a rift in their relationship. They ultimately married under the Special Marriage Act, followed by Hindu and Muslim ceremonies. Despite facing rejection from pandits and maulvis during their ceremonial weddings, they found solace in the support of understanding individuals who were willing to officiate their marriage. P5F recalls the emotional moment of signing their marriage papers, reflecting on the journey they had undertaken to be together. Their marital conflicts typically revolve around household chores, but they remain content in their relationship. Prejudice from distant relatives added to their challenges, with P5F recounting an incident where her mother-in-law stood up for her when distant relatives in

Calcutta started calling her "Mahira" after the Muslim marriage ceremony. This acceptance eased her discomfort and reinforced her sense of belonging. She acknowledges that acceptance might have been harder to come by in her hometown of Jamshedpur due to societal perceptions and prejudices. Nonetheless, they find support from P5M's family, who accompany them to both Dargahs and Mandirs, respecting each other's religions and cultures equally. For them, the strength of their relationship lies in mutual respect and acceptance. They emphasize the importance of giving love a chance despite societal pressures and obstacles, embodying their belief in the power of understanding and embracing differences.

Case 6

The sixth couple resides and works in Malaysia, comprising P6M from India, aged 34 and Hindu, and P6F, aged 33 from Germany, of Christian faith. Married for five years, they met on a dating app during the COVID era, bonding over shared values and P6F's affinity for Indian culture. Their marriage under the Special Marriage Act (SMA) smoothly incorporated cultural ceremonies. Initial concerns about wedding dress colors were swiftly resolved. Conflict primarily arises from daily adjustments, with potential disagreements looming over discussions about children. P6M leans towards a more family-centric approach, while P6F prioritizes autonomy. Despite differences, they find satisfaction in their relationship, attributing its strength to mutual acceptance and respect. Both maintain individual bonds with their families, facilitating harmony. They emphasize the importance of stepping out of one's comfort zone to understand each other's perspectives and cultures, fostering mutual growth and appreciation

Case 7

Both the couple hail from Haryana, both are in their late 20's and have been married for 3 months. P7F belongs to Hindu faith P7M belongs to Muslim faith. They both met when they were quite young, they both were neighbours and lived in the same village. However their relationship wasn't much appreciated and were told to part ways from both the sides of the families. They both maintained on and off long distance and live-in relationship and got married after pursuing 15 years of relationship. P7F's family posed a major life threat to them due to which they had to take help from Dhanak which helped them through their marriage process. They both had the threat for honour killing and therefore they shifted their base from their hometown. Both sides of parents are not in contact with them however P7M's family is still open to the idea. Despite facing these challenges, they both are thankful that help was provided from the NGO to be able to live a life of happiness. She describes her marriage experience as surreal and scary as there were many police officers while they were signing their marriage under special marriage act (SMA) Despite these challenges their marriage satisfaction is good and they would not want to marry anyone else. While discussions about the conflict P7F describes their conflict as minor argument which doesn't involve any major issues, according to her they both understand each other well after a long relationship and therefore fight are not usual. She believes that strength of her relationship is understanding, care and acceptance. She expanded on to say they both have similar nature and they. Give space for each other to grow. With new life on the way they are excited to start their new journey and live happily

Table No: 2 Codes, themes and sub-themes of coping with marriage expectations among sexual minority women

Sr. No.	Codes	Themes	Subthemes
1.	Relationship Dynamics	Relationship Dynamic and Child Rearing	Household equality Positive things about relationship Religious satisfaction
		Role of Religion and issues of conversion	Traditionalist vs religious Process of SMA/conversion
		Conflicts in family life and conflict resolution	Marital conflicts Conflict resolution
2.	Acceptance	Losses and Sacrifices	Feeling of anger /guilt/confusion Loss of tradition
		Role of acceptance and creating shared traditions	Acceptance Common values New traditions
3	Resilience	Family and social perceptions	Family challenges /acceptance/reactions Societal perceptions
		Factors affecting resilience	Challenges Advices and important things to remember Resilient factors

DISCUSSION

1. Dynamics

Main theme: Relationship Dynamic and Child Rearing

Exploring interfaith partnerships in this theme reveals complex dynamics in household responsibilities and decision-making [6]. Couples challenge traditional gender roles, fostering collaboration and mutual decision-making in tasks like cooking and cleaning. While some couples opt out of parenthood, others embrace it with a pragmatic, secular worldview for their children [6]. Successful relationships hinge on effective communication and mutual respect, supported by shared values and resilience within families. Despite challenges, core relationship values endure, highlighting the evolving landscape of relationships and parenting

Sub theme: Household equality and child rearing

Contrary to prior study expectations [7], religion had no substantial influence on birth control decisions. It did, however, play an important impact in decisions about abortion, premarital cohabitation, and sex, frequently handing over decision-making power to the spouse with stronger religious beliefs. Furthermore, our research demonstrates a tendency of egalitarianism in family chores among interfaith couples, which mirrors broader societal movements toward gender equality. Regarding motherhood, couples demonstrated various opinions, with many

opting for a non- religious approach to rearing their children, while some wants to remain child free and few don't mind children following partner's religion.

“If there is an option to not declare your religion for my child mostly it would go like that “(P5F)

“she is good at cooking, she does cooking, I do other work” (P5M)

Sub theme: Positive things about relationship

This sub-theme focused on identifying and evaluating the positive aspects of the relationship. By highlighting moments of delight, understanding, and shared accomplishments, it aimed to shed light on the qualities that contributed to a healthy and fulfilling partnership. Within the context of exploring positive relationship dynamics, a recurring theme was the paramount role of effective communication. Couples consistently underscored the importance of open, genuine dialogue, allowing for the free expression of emotions and mutual respect for differing viewpoints. Key to their contentment was a deliberate commitment to prioritising each other's well-being, creating an atmosphere where minor issues did not disrupt the overall harmony. A shared value among these couples was the intentional allocation of quality time. They actively engaged in conversations about their daily lives, collaboratively addressed challenges, and synchronised their responsibilities. Ultimately, the positive aspects of these

relationships were deeply rooted in effective communication, shared values, and a robust foundation of trust, collectively contributing to their enduring happiness.

"How we communicated with each other without any ego or without getting defensive. How mature we were in handling that. I don't think I could see it in other people."(PIF)

Sub theme: Relationship satisfaction

Understanding relationship satisfaction is key, and this sub-theme explores the factors influencing it, providing insights into what contributes to couples' fulfilment. Couples consistently cite respect and valuing each other as crucial for maintaining strong marriages. A bond based on respect and understanding helps them overcome hurdles, making their marriages fulfilling. The transition from dating to marriage brought new challenges, but couples stress the importance of building a strong friendship, enabling open communication and understanding. Overall, the interviews convey happiness and contentment in relationships, with couples attributing their resilience to shared values and respect. This aligns with studies findings on critical factors influencing marital satisfaction[8].

"I am happy. I think nothing matters... We are really happy... We learn new things about each other every day... As we are growing older, we realise what is important to us and what is right, what is wrong."(P2F)

Main Theme: Role of Religion in Relationship and Conversion

Religion significantly influences interfaith partnerships. In dating, couples prioritize open-mindedness and tolerance, fostering mutual understanding. However, the conversion process, particularly in interfaith marriages, adds complexity. Legal conversion, necessary for Muslim marriages, poses bureaucratic hurdles. Some couples choose the pragmatic approach of the Special Marriage Act (SMA). Simulated conversions, while resilient, highlight challenges like societal biases and familial resistance. Simulated conversions, while

showcasing resilience, highlight challenges like societal biases and familial resistance. Overall, religion and conversion impact relationships positively and negatively.

Sub theme: Traditionalist vs religious

The theme delves into couples' religious dynamics during courtship, revealing a prevalent non-religious or spiritual/traditional stance. The study reveals that during the courting phase, many couples describe a non-religious or spiritual/traditional orientation, irrespective of family background. This environment fosters peaceful coexistence of varied religious beliefs. Couples often share a belief in a higher power or God without strict adherence to specific religious doctrines. While some enjoy cultural aspects of religious celebrations, others prioritize rituals aligning with personal beliefs. Couples navigate religious diversity by emphasizing mutual understanding beyond individual religious commitments. Additionally, dating couples exhibit a complex approach to spirituality, prioritizing personal views and cultural rituals over strict allegiance to organized religion. Personal insights, childhood experiences, and shared commitment to principles that transcend religious barriers contribute to religious engagement flexibility.

"I am a practicing Hindu. But I'm not the fussy ones. I don't go to the temple every day or I would pray. Don't eat this, don't eat that. But so yeah, mostly spiritual" (P6M).

Sub theme: Conversion and Process of Special marriage act(SMA)

This sub-theme explores the complexities of religious conversion and the Special Marriage Act (SMA) process in interfaith relationships.

"We opted for SMA, there were a lot of problems in the process like the marriage officers in Delhi who don't want to get married because they don't support an interfaith marriage model" (P4M).

"Legal Muslim marriage needs the conversion... but we didn't do that marriage."

We did the special marriage act... For those papers, they did some Muslim prayers. But because we were already married by then, legally, we just kept that paper for the namesake" (PIF).

This theme delves into the complexities of religious conversion and the Special Marriage Act (SMA) in interfaith relationships. Couples often encounter challenges with SMA procedures due to bureaucratic obstacles and societal biases. Additionally, some couples resort to simulated conversions to obtain necessary documents. Organisations like Dhanak play a crucial role in providing support throughout this process. The process involves submitting various documents to the marriage registrar, subject to approval and a notice period. This period allows for objections or modifications, highlighting bureaucratic complexities within the SMA procedure. Couples may opt for a religious ceremony after completing SMA, emphasizing the need for witnesses and their identification details

Main theme: conflict in family life and conflict resolution

This theme devolves into understanding common conflicts among couples and conflict resolution strategies. It helps to understand problems of interfaith couples, resulting from lifestyle to food choices. This theme also helps us to understand if the religion plays a role in the conflicts. Which is negligent in these narratives. Conflict resolution also is seen which deductive reasoning being one of the strategies.

Sub theme: Conflicts in family life and resolution

Interfaith marriages face unique challenges beyond religious differences, including conflicts over food choices, cultural expectations, and family tasks. These disagreements often revolve around symbolic concerns, reflecting broader arguments about lifestyle and personal values. Despite these obstacles, interfaith couples demonstrate resilience through

compromise and open communication, emphasizing the importance of understanding and flexibility in managing their relationships.

" Yeah, a bunch of conflicts. They are very normal like Yeah, she likes more salt than I do. And she likes more spicy food than I do. But all of that stuff is just, you know, general genetic things. I would say that in an interfaith marriage, a bunch of conflicts could arise if both of the parties involved are very religious as in they are practicing their religion very well very keenly right then some you know conflicts might arise and maybe something that she's doing is interfering with what i am doing and all of that stuff could happen in a marriage like that "(PM4)

Interfaith couples exhibit exceptional conflict resolution skills, using varied communication strategies. They address differences with tolerance and understanding, engaging in open discussions for more significant concerns. Conflicts without immediate resolution are handled through continued dialogue. Mutual respect and understanding deepen their partnership, reflecting previous research on the positive impact of combined religious participation on marital satisfaction [9]

"We'll talk about it. We'll argue about it. We'll debate about it. And we'll discuss the pros and cons of your argument and pros and cons of my argument."(PM4)

2. Acceptance

Main theme: Losses and sacrifices

Research elucidated the emotional complexity of losses and sacrifices in interfaith partnerships. Participants grappled with conflicts between personal desires, familial expectations, and cultural norms, experiencing emotions like anger and regret. However, they resisted cultural pressures, asserting personal autonomy.(6) Despite mourning lost traditions, individuals showed resilience by integrating diverse cultural practices creatively, forging new rituals. This journey underscored the emotional turbulence and adaptive strategies inherent in

interfaith unions, fostering meaningful relationships amidst diversity

Sub theme: Loss of tradition

It explored the poignant aspect of relinquishing cherished customs in interfaith unions, capturing the emotional toll of bidding farewell to familiar rituals. Participants grappled with adapting to new cultural practices while mourning the absence of familiar traditions, signaling internal conflicts. Despite challenges, they embraced personal empowerment, rejecting guilt over diverging from familial norms. Transitioning from loss to abundance, couples forged new traditions blending both backgrounds, evident in celebrations merging Diwali and Christmas. The narrative underscores the necessity of compromise and realistic adjustments in balancing familial expectations, showcasing participants' resilience

“I think for us, it became more about not loss, but more excess, I would say. We celebrate more festivals now”(P6M)

Sub theme: Feelings of anger, guilt, and confusion

Emotional complexities within interfaith relationships, including anger, guilt, and confusion, manifest as participants navigate conflicts between individual choices and familial expectations. Instances such as wearing a hijab despite societal judgment evoke anger and guilt, while frustration over gender roles and differing religious rituals adds to the emotional intricacy. Despite encountering familial pressures and sexist traditions, participants assert personal empowerment, challenging feelings of guilt. These dynamics highlight the nuanced landscape of interfaith relationships, emphasizing the challenges and adaptations involved

“I struggled in doing it because I was like, okay, will these people ask me to do it always or will somebody else see it and mistake me and should I even do it? That was another thing. If they ask also or they expect it from me also, if I am not okay, should I do it?.

Then another question was, am I not doing it for wrong reasons? So, that was there. If I really am uncomfortable keeping apart all of my upbringing or my society's expectations, then it is fine. But I am uncomfortable due to these reasons only. Like what my family told me or what society thinks if a Hindu girl does? My husband did it so easily I thought why cant I?”(P1F)

Main theme: Role of Acceptance and Creating Shared Traditions

This theme delves into how acceptance is essential for developing a peaceful interfaith connection. It dives into the process of accepting divergent ideas and practices, emphasizing the development of shared traditions to bring together the distinct characteristics that each spouse brings to the union. Discovered that couples frequently deal with spiritual differences by participating in one other's activities and forming new traditions together.

Sub theme: Acceptance

Acceptance in interfaith partnerships involves embracing diversity, respecting distinct backgrounds, and fostering understanding for a united and fulfilling relationship. Participants' narratives illustrate journeys toward cultural and religious acceptance, exemplified by instances such as familial affirmation of individual identities and appreciation of diverse customs. Daily practices like prayers and fasting demonstrate harmonious coexistence and mutual respect. Celebrations such as Diwali, Eid, and Christmas signify commitment to shared rituals, fostering a sense of belonging and harmony. Overall, these experiences underscore the importance of acceptance, respect, and understanding in interfaith relationships

“My husband did it so easily, whatever it is Hindu things, he did it so easily. So, I was like, what is different from him and me? I understood that it is just a society's thing. So, slowly I also was able to respect their things. And I don't mind doing it at all and it is the least thing I can do. I feel”(P1F)

“So, his relatives from Kolkata, they were very orthodox. I didn't know they were calling me Fatima*(given in Muslim marriage). So, my mother-in-law, she has recently visited Kolkata. So, when she talks to me, we talk on video call daily. So, in and around, her sister-in-law also talks to me, so she was calling me Fatima*, so she asked her why did you call her Fatima* so my mother-in-law said that we have not taken her name and identity from her she is Aarti for us*(P5F)

Sub theme: Common Values

This subtheme explores how shared values and new traditions bolster the cohesion of interfaith marriages. Participants prioritize values like humanity, kindness, and respect, transcending religious differences. They maintain commitment to healthy living and family values, fostering strong connections with extended family and elders. Actively cultivating new traditions reflects their shared journey while respecting individual religious backgrounds. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the significance of shared values and innovative traditions in enhancing the resilience and harmony of interfaith relationships[1].

“There are definitely some beliefs or some practices which we believe are common across many religions, like the practice of humanity, for example, of being kind to others, being respectful to others. This is something that all the religion teaches its followers. So in terms of these values, we definitely follow these values.”(P3M)

Sub theme: Creating new Traditions

The study highlights interfaith couples' joint efforts in establishing shared values and unique traditions while respecting each other's religious backgrounds. Drawing from existing literature [1], it suggests that engaging in religious customs together enhances satisfaction. Couples participate in cultural festivals like Diwali and Eid, blending their backgrounds to foster tolerance and unity. Despite challenges, they adapt to life abroad by commemorating

holidays with extended family, showcasing their commitment to a shared culture. Organizations like Dhanak offer support, reaffirming the importance of preserving common traditions

“Like in husband's society, they know that I am a Hindu and they are family. But still, we exchanged sweets on Diwali. We exchanged sweets on Eid. And even in Naveed's society, there is Garba, Durga Puja, Ganesh Puja. My mother-in-law goes, plays Garba. She does all that aarti for Ganesh ji, Durga ji.”(P5F)

“ We don't have family around, so we celebrate Diwali or Eid for its tradition like inviting friends over, buying sweets and decorating household, it's our own little world here” (P4M).

3. Resilience

Main theme: Family and Social Perceptions

This broad issue investigates the complex dynamics of familial and society attitudes in interfaith marriages. It spans multiple levels, delving into the complexity of familial acceptance, reactions, and the greater society perspective on interfaith partnerships. Understanding these impressions is critical for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles and dynamics underlying interfaith relationships

Sub theme: Family challenges/acceptance/reactions

The study delves into challenges faced by interfaith couples within their families, highlighting complexities of acceptance and reactions from extended family. Consistent with prior research [6], it underscores struggles navigating familial and cultural expectations. Findings reveal tensions over religious differences during courtship, intensifying with long-term commitments like marriage. Reactions vary, from outright rejection to eventual acceptance, driven by concerns about honour and tradition. Some couples faced threat of honour killing, adding fuel to the reactions. Couples balance personal beliefs with cultural expectations,

making sacrifices and incorporating traditions to foster acceptance. Fear of condemnation and societal standards exacerbate strain. Despite challenges, narratives illustrate resolve to pursue love across denominational boundaries, relying on compromise, communication, and mutual respect.

“My family decided that it was necessary for them to stop this marriage right and that is why They took me to my sister's place in Rajasthan. That is where I was kept for a month. During this time, a bunch of stuff happened. My belongings were taken from me. I was asked to break up with her” (P4M)

Sub theme: social perception

The societal perception of interfaith unions presents significant challenges for couples, ranging from initial minimisation of religious differences to eventual acceptance amidst societal biases and familial pressures. Despite facing institutional resistance and reactions from friends, interfaith couples exhibit resilience, relying on compromise, communication, and mutual respect to foster enduring partnerships. Their ability to navigate these challenges underscores the importance of reevaluating established societal standards and cultural expectations, highlighting the transformative power of practical wisdom and emotional tenacity in overcoming external pressures and building lasting relationships.

“So now my parents are afraid of accepting me because of the society. The society that has never been of any use to them. We have always been there for them. But now they want to be in front of the society. But I think one day this will happen. Earlier, there was a caste system. There were a lot of issues in inter-caste marriages. Like, I won't drink the water from her house, and all that. But similarly, I feel that religion too, after a point in time, you know, it will be over. Like, how caste became like” (P5F)

Factors Shaping Resilience in Interfaith Unions

Understanding the factors shaping resilience in interfaith unions is crucial for navigating the diverse challenges faced by couples. From societal expectations to internal conflicts, recognizing and addressing these obstacles is essential for fostering resilience and ensuring the success of interfaith relationships.

Sub theme: Resilient Factors

In interfaith marriages, resilience emerges as a crucial element for overcoming challenges and nurturing a strong bond. Couples exhibit resilience through unwavering support during difficult times, mutual acceptance, and the ability to handle conflicts constructively. Shared responsibilities and solidarity against external stressors further strengthen their relationship. Moreover, resilience extends to navigating societal conventions, familial objections, and religious expectations together. Couples demonstrate mutual support and unity in the face of criticism, emphasizing acceptance and stability in their partnership. This resilience is supported by findings from [1], which highlight the importance of mutual respect, shared values, spirituality, and social support.

“So like when the other person is not there, nothing went right and you didn't feel like yourself. You felt so incomplete. You felt like You are just a body and soul moving. You didn't feel life. So that was there. Then so many difficulties and so many questions came in front of us. How will we do it? But then the way we resolved those issues, that brought trust in us. How we communicated with each other without any ego or without getting defended. How mature we were in handling that. I don't think I could see it in other people.” (P1F)

Sub theme: Challenges faced by couples

Challenges faced by interfaith couples, including family dynamics, communication issues, financial concerns, and clashes in cultural expectations, impact marital

satisfaction. Resistance from religious authorities like pandits and maulvis and organizations, social stigma, and legal complexities further complicate these relationships. The threat of honour killings were also a big part of what couples faced. Even though the special marriage act (SMA) had made things easier to get married for these couples. The 30 day notice period poses a threat to many the study revealed. The Main issue being the public notice and anyone can come to object the marriage and in the view of the interviewees should be changed. It's the biggest loophole for security.

"I think main challenge was to tell our parents, the day I told my parents I slept peacefully. Like a wait has been lifted off my shoulder"(P2F)

Sub theme: Advice and Important Considerations:

This dimension, which draws on the experiences of interfaith couples, contains excellent advice and comments. It is a practical guide for people starting or navigating an interfaith marriage. It also includes important aspects for developing a strong and durable interfaith partnership. They caution against expecting a perfect, fairy-tale conclusion and emphasize the significance of commitment and determination to overcoming the inevitable obstacles. Patience and understanding are emphasized as important traits for resolving differences and managing the intricacies of various religious backgrounds. Furthermore, emphasizing the partner over all other connections is emphasized as critical for promoting unity and mutual enjoyment. Not forcing each other's religion on one another is another way to ensure long lasting marriage. Strategies for dealing with external pressures and public criticism include open communication, boundary setting, and the formation of shared traditions. Interviewees also emphasize the significance of financial and legal preparedness in order to successfully manage potential challenges.

"Because once you start imposing, then there is no boundaries. Then you don't know, like, where to stop. And I think people, like, it should come by free will. Like, if I want to do something from another religion, Um, also not expecting, not pushing your partner to dosomething just because his family is saying to do. So maybe like telling the family, like, you know, she doesn't want to do it. So don't force that kind of stuff."(P2F)

CONCLUSION

The study of interfaith partnerships has revealed the complex dynamics of acceptance, resilience and the interactions of societal factors. Couples navigating these relationships display amazing adaptability, conflict resolution and mutual understanding in the face of multiple hurdles. Acceptance emerges as a significant pattern, with couples respecting cultural and religious differences while creating new rituals based on their shared values and dedication to unity. They foster harmony in their relationships by encouraging open communication and mutual respect. Another major feature of interfaith unions is resilience, with couples exhibiting exceptional tenacity in the face of societal prejudices, familial obstacles, and personal hardships. Their ability to face external difficulties with unity and determination reveals the depth of their emotional connection and dedication to one another's well-being.

The concept of social conformance explains how society norms and expectations influence people's behaviour and decisions in interfaith relationships. Couples may experience external pressures to comply to established conventions, resulting in tensions and obstacles. They, however, challenge these standards through resilience and mutual support, resulting in new narratives that contradict society expectations and encourage acceptance and understanding.

To summarize, interfaith relationships are complicated and multidimensional, but they also provide chances for growth, comprehension, and mutual respect. Couples form long-lasting ties that cross cultural and

religious boundaries by accepting each other, negotiating conflicts with perseverance, and questioning conventional standards. Their experience demonstrates the power of love, communication, and shared ideals in overcoming hurdles and forming lasting relationships. Implications for interfaith relationships include legal reforms ensuring equal rights, access to resources for support, and education to promote acceptance. Limitations involve inadequate religious diversity and insufficient representation of parental perspectives. Future research should explore interfaith dynamics across diverse age groups, cultures, and religious backgrounds to deepen understanding and promote inclusivity.

Declaration by Authors

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